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Summary: Ross King had only ever surrounded herself with her four best friends. She's never realized how much of a constant they were in her life until one of them goes missing. Prequel to Perplexed, set in S1 of ST.

1. Chapter 1

PREQUEL

If you have not read *Perplexed*, the first story set in S2 of Stranger Things(also a crossover with IT 2017), you should totally go do that first. If not, whatever. I can't do anything about it.

"Something is coming. Something hungry for blood."

Ross furrowed her eyebrows at Mike's words, thinking of what it could possibly be. Mostly *anything* dangerous in Dungeons & Dragons was out for blood, so there wasn't much to go off of.

They were in Mike's basement, 10 hours into their Dungeons & Dragons campaign. They'd spent weeks planning it, and were all excited to finally do it. Ross herself, who'd just finally decided to join the bandwagon that summer, was ecstatic.

"A shadow grows on the wall behind you, swallowing you in darkness," he continued. "It is almost here."

"What is it?" Will asks, leaning forward slightly. All of them knew, however, that Mike would not tell them. At least, not without building up to it dramatically, leaving them in suspense.

"What if it's the Demogorgon?" Dustin asked. Ross rolled her eyes, as Will groaned and leaned back in his chair. Dustin *always* thought it was the Demogorgon. "Oh, Jesus, we're so screwed if it's the Demogorgon."

"No way," Ross told him, shaking her head. "It's not *always* going to be a Demogorgon."

"You don't know that," Dustin said to her, widening his eyes.

"It's *not* the Demogorgon," Lucas stressed, shaking his head. "Why do you always guess the Demogorgon?" Dustin opened his mouth to bite back a reply, but Mike interrupted him.

"An army of troglodytes charge into the chamber!" Mike exclaimed, slamming down the monster's piece. Lucas sat back in triumph, giving Dustin an I-told-you-so look.

"Troglodytes?" their Bard asked in disbelief, with a hint of disappointment.

"Told ya," Lucas said, chuckling afterwards. They all laughed, inwardly relieved that it wasn't anything *actually* harmful. At least, not as harmful as the Demogorgon.

Ross noticed that Mike was not laughing with them, and immediately dropped her smile.

"Wait a minute," Mike said softly, looking behind him. "Did you hear that? That-that sound?"

"Oh, no," Ross said beneath her breath, casting the other members of the party small glances.

"Boom...boom...," Mike started, looking back forward. Suddenly, he jumped forward and slammed his hands on the table, making them all jump. "Boom!"

He waited a second, making sure he had their attention. "That didn't come from the troglodytes. No, that-that came from something else."

Of course it did, Ross thought to herself, watching Mike for his next move. He swung out his arm, and slammed a piece in the middle of the board.

"The Demogorgon!"

All of them groaned, hitting the table in frustration. Will even dropped his head into his arms.

"We're in deep shit!" Dustin exclaimed.

"Will, your action?" Mike questioned.

"I don't know!" Will said, shaking his head.

"Fireball him!" Lucas said, waving his hands around.

"I'd have to roll a 13 or higher!"

"Too risky," Dustin said. "Cast a protection spell!"

"Don't be a pussy!" Lucas snapped. "Fireball him!"

"Cast. Protection," Dustin urged.

Mike slammed the table again. "The Demogorgon is tired of your silly human bickering! It stomps towards you! Boom!"

Ross brought a hand to her mouth, biting her fingernail. What should he do? Fireball him, or cast protection? Ross didn't know. And she didn't want to say either, because what if she was wrong?

"Fireball him!" Lucas exclaimed.

"Another stomp, boom!"

"Cast protection," Dustin retorted.

"He roars in anger!"

Both Lucas and Dustin nearly got up from their seats, pounding the table, yelling at Will to either fireball him, or cast protection. Over the yelling, it finally seemed Will had made up his mind.

"Fireball!" he yelled, throwing the die out onto the table, with a bit too much force. Ross watched them as they clattered over the edge.

"Oh shit!" Lucas hissed as they disappeared from sight. "Where'd it go?"

Ross got up from her chair, as did the boys, and immediately dropped to the ground to scour the floor.

"Where is it?" Lucas asked again.

"I don't know!" Will exclaimed.

"Is it under the stairs?" Ross asked hurriedly.

"Is it a 13?" Dustin asked.

"I don't know!" Will repeated.

"Where is it?"

As Ross climbed underneath the table, Dustin began to pace, hands on his head. "Oh, my god," he began to utter, over and over again.

From upstairs, Ross heard Mike's mom call down for him.

"Can you find it yet?"

"Mike!" Mrs. Wheeler yelled again.

"No, I can't find it!" Will said. Ross ran her hands along the carpet, waiting to come across the small die.

"Mike!"

"Mom, we're in the middle of a campaign!" Ross heard Mike say.

"You mean the end?" Mrs. Wheeler asked. "Fifteen after."

Ross jumped up so hard she banged her head on the bottom of the table. Crawling out from underneath it she rubbed the sore spot, looking over to Mike. "Fifteen after?" she asked. "Shit!"

Mike sighed, and began to climb the steps. Ross was quick to race after him, following him through the living room, where Mr. Wheeler was adjusting the TV antennas, and into the kitchen.

"Mom, wait," Mike pleaded to Mrs. Wheeler, "just 20 more minutes!"

"It's a school night, Michael," his mom reminded him.

"Could I use your phone, Mrs. Wheeler?" Ross asked.

"Of course, Ross," Mrs. Wheeler said kindly. Ross snatched the phone off the receiver and began to dial home.

"I just put Holly to bed," Mrs. Wheeler continued. "You can finish next weekend."

"But that'll ruin the flow!"

Ross brought the phone to her left ear, and stuck her finger in her right ear, to block out any other noise. Miss B, Will's mom, had taught her the trick one day when they were at Will's house. Ross was trying to call home, and the rest of the boys were being loud.

The phone rang a few times before someone finally picked up.

"*Hello?"*

"Dad?" Ross asked nervously, unsure how the conversation would go.

"*Roslyn?"*

"Yeah, Dad."

"*Where the hell are you? You were supposed to be home 15 minutes ago,"* her dad said from the other end. He didn't sound particularly angry, just annoyed.

"I know," Ross sighed. "And I'm sorry."

She glanced at Mike and his mom, then dropped her voice lower, not quite to a whisper. "It's just, Mrs. Wheeler couldn't give me a ride home because she's having trouble putting Holly to bed," Ross lied. "And Mr. Wheeler is trying to fix their TV."

"*Dammit, Ross,"* she heard her dad mutter.

"I'm sorry, Dad. Will you be able to pick me up?"

"*None of the other boys can get you home?"*

"Not unless I ride my bike to one of their houses," Ross told him.

"*No, it's dark out. I'll be there in a few minutes,"* her dad said with a heavy sigh. Ross rolled her eyes.

"Dad, Lucas's house is just down the street. I could ride down-"

"*I'll be there,"* her dad repeated. "*Just be ready, make sure you have everything."*

"Okay," Ross said, slightly dismayed. "Thank you."

"*Your welcome,"* he said back. "*See you in a few."*

"See you."

The line went dead, and Ross placed the phone back up on the receiver.

"Will your dad be able to come pick you up?" Mrs. Wheeler asked Ross as she turned around.

"Yeah, he will," Ross reassured her. "Thank you for letting me use your phone."

"Oh, it's no problem," Mrs. Wheeler waved it off. "Anytime, sweetie."

By now, the boys were already emerging from the basement with their things, Dustin with a box of pizza. She didn't question it as he headed upstairs. He was probably going to talk to Nancy.

"Here, Ross," Will said, handing over her bag.

"Thanks," she smiled, swinging the back pack over her shoulder. She followed the boys out the back door, and her and Mike watched as they loaded up onto their bikes. Ross herself had her bike there, but her dad didn't really like her riding home by herself in the dark.

The door shut behind them, and Ross turned to see Dustin exiting the house.

"There's something wrong with your sister," the curly-haired boy said as he walked past Ross.

"What are you talking about?" Mike asked.

"She's got a stick up her butt."

Ross snorted. She never really talked to the older girl anymore, as Nancy kind of intimidated her now, but from the few interactions they'd had as of late, Ross had to agree.

"Yeah," Lucas said, kicking up his kickstand on his bike. "It's because she's been dating that douchebag, Steve Harrington."

"He seems nice," Ross noted quietly, shrugging her shoulders. Lucas turned around to give her a look.

"Yeah, well, he's related to Troy, so he's automatically an asshole," Lucas told her. Ross nodded in consideration.

Troy Harrington *was* an asshole. But, from the *very* few times she'd ran into or talked to Steve, he seemed nice enough. Of course, he could've just been nice because she's five years younger than him, *and* she was a girl.

"She's turning into a real jerk," Dustin added.

"She's *always* been a real jerk," Mike stressed.

Dustin, Will, and Lucas all clicked on their bike's headlights. *That* was one of the reasons Ross wasn't able to ride alone at night. She wouldn't be able to see the road. At one point in time, her dad just suggested she tape a flashlight to her handle bars. But, then she forgot to turn it off, and the flashlight died one night when she was riding home alone. It surprised her, and she'd veered off the road and fell off her bike. She had a scar to show for it on her knee, although it would probably fade away within the next few years.

Her dad said he'd try and save the money to get her a new bike with a light, but she didn't really believe him.

"Nuh-uh, she used to be cool," Dustin said. "Like that time she dressed up as an elf for our Elder tree campaign."

"Four years ago!" Mike reminded him.

"Just sayin!" Dustin said as he pedaled down the drive. Lucas followed, throwing a quick farewell over his shoulder as he went.

"Later."

"Bye, guys," Ross called after them, smiling as the two threw a hand up to wave.

Will stayed back, silent for a few seconds before he looked over to Mike. "It was a seven," he finally said.

This caught Ross and Mike's attention, and they both turned to look at him.

"Huh?" Mike asked.

"The roll," Will reminded them. "It was a seven. The Demogorgon, it got me."

He looked down to his pedals and placed his feet on one, grunting as he pushed off with the other. "Well, see you tomorrow."

"Bye, Will," Ross said as he pedaled away.

Above Ross and Mike, the light flickered. They both looked towards it, yet it didn't flicker again. "Freaky," Ross muttered.

Mike moved to close the garage door, so Ross quickly wheeled her bike outside, and then hurried back in as he pressed the button.

"Is your dad coming?" Mike asked as he led her back inside. They passed through the kitchen, and sat down on the steps in front of the front door, since his dad was still in the living room.

"Yeah, said he'd be here in a bit," Ross said. "Don't get why I couldn't have just rode my bike home, though. Not like I'm gonna die on the way back."

"When is he going to get you the new one?"

"Never, probably," Ross sighed, leaning back and shrugging. "But still. Will's had a light, I could have ridden with him to his house, then the rest of the way back to mine. Could have made it just fine."

Mike shrugged, like he didn't really have anything to offer her. But then he said, "My mom could have given you a ride."

Ross sighed again. "Yeah, I know. I just don't like to bother her with small things like that. There's more important things she has to worry about. Like paying bills, or something."

Mike laughed quietly at that, and they were both silent for a moment. "Do you think we'll continue the campaign next weekend?" Ross asked.

"Probably not," Mike shook his head. "It'll be hard to pick up where we left off. And the Demogorgon got Will, anyway. It'll be easier to just restart."

She hummed in agreement.

"When Will was rolling, why didn't you say anything?"

Ross sat up, and turned to face Mike, who was already watching her. "What?"

"When Will was rolling. Lucas and Dustin were telling him what to do, but you didn't. Why not? You usually do." Mike asked, frowning slightly.

Ross shrugged. "I don't know. I wasn't sure what he should do."

"What would you have done?"

She considered the question for a moment, before shrugging yet again. "I don't know."

"Do you know anything?" Mike asked jokingly. She smiled and playfully shoved him, rolling her eyes.

"Yeah. I *know* that you're a loser," she quipped back, snorting as he shoved her back.

Through the curtains of the windows, Ross saw a bright light. Standing up she grabbed her bag, and swung it onto her shoulder.

"Alright," she said, giving him a small wave. "See you tomorrow, yeah?"

"Yeah," Mike said back, climbing to his feet with a smile. "Goodnight, Ross."

"Goodnight."

She shut the door behind her, then crossed her arms as the cold air bit through her jacket. Her dad's truck was at the curb, and her dad himself was already on his way up the drive.

David King leaned down to pick up his daughter's bike as she walked up to him. Heaving it off the ground, he nodded towards the truck.

"Load up," he said. "It's cold, and I've got food cooking at home."

"Oh," Ross said, happy that her dad wasn't angry for not being home on time. "What're we having?"

"You like shrimp, right?"

When Ross woke up the next morning her dad was already gone. Off to work, bright and early, just as he always was. With a heavy sigh she rolled out of her bed and set to get ready for the day, which really just included changing.

Her house was always cold, even during the summer for some odd reason, but it was *especially* cold during the mornings. But Ross liked the cold. She liked it much better than heat.

If she had to choose between being too cold or too hot, she would choose the cold in a heartbeat. When it was cold, it was easy to warm up. She could use blankets or layer her clothing. Sometimes she'd even microwave some food, just so she could hold the warm plate or bowl. But when it was hot, she was uncomfortable. She'd have to wear shorts and a tank top(she despised tank tops). She could only wear a swimsuit when she went swimming with the boys, but Ross also didn't like swimming all that much. Plus, with heat came sunburns, and being a redhead, Ross burned easily. It was also sweaty when it was hot. Sweat made Ross feel uncomfortable, like her clothes were sticking to her skin.

So she was completely comfortable venturing through the cold halls of her home, dressed for the day with her backpack over her shoulder. She went to the kitchen to grab something to eat, preferably an apple, and was surprised to find a brown paper bag on the counter. Her name was marked on it with her dad's messy scrawl.

To say Ross was not even slightly suspicious would be a lie. Her dad never left her stuff, not unless he did something that upset them *both* and he wanted to make up for it, or if he wouldn't be back until the next day. But even then, her dad told her at *least* the day before.

So maybe he was trying to be nice. If it was what Ross thought it was, lunch, maybe it was left over shrimp. She'd told him she loved the shrimp he'd cooked last night, maybe he thought it would make her happy. And it did. Just the *thought* of him doing something like that made her smile.

Up until she looked inside the bag. She'd been right, there was shrimp. But there was also a small note with the word 'Sorry' written on it. Sighing, Ross pulled the note out all the way and unfolded it.

Sorry,

Won't be back until early tomorrow. Got early call. There's more shrimp in fridge, bag is for lunch. Call Joyce if you need anything, send her my thank you's.

Love you, Dad

Ross huffed, tossing the note onto the floor and snatching the bag from the counter. As she stomped angrily to the door, she couldn't help but feel guilty for being mad. No, she wasn't mad, she was *frustrated.* And she felt guilty for it.

She knew she couldn't blame him, it's not like he *planned* to be called out for work. But it still irked her to know that he didn't even wake her up and tell her in person. Or that he didn't tell them no.

But, it wasn't like she could do anything about it now. So Ross took her frustration out the door and put it into biking to school as fast as she could. She was running late, per usual, but at the rate she was going she might make it to school on time.

But if Ross hadn't been in such a sour mood, and if she would have slowed down, she might have noticed that Joyce Byers's car was still parked in the Byers's driveway, and that Jonathan had yet to leave for school as well, for his car was there, too.

She also might have noticed a painfully familiar bike discarded on the side of Mirkwood, all alone, it's owner long gone.

Disclaimer: I do not own the plot, characters, or idea Stranger Things

A/N: lol, looks who's backkkk. I think this is around the time I said I would upload the first chapter of the prequel, if not, sorry to disappoint. This is officially my second fanfiction, which is a bit weird to think of. Anywho, I'm super busy, so I might not be on top of the ball with updating, but I WILL be aiming for once a week like with my last story. So, this story is a prequel to my first one, based on season 1 of Stranger Things. Hope you kids enjoy! (sorry for any spelling/grammatical errors, autocorrect is on this time so is should be better) (and you should all totally review because it makes me feel better as a person:) but no pressure)

-blockthewriter

2. Chapter 2

Ross arrived at the school just in time to see Troy Harrington and his right hand man push past Lucas, Mike, and Dustin rather roughly. Instantly her face soured up, and her mood sped up it's pace on it's path down hill. She could only imagine what the bully had teased the boys with this time. Probably their given nicknames that made Ross want to castrate Harrington on the spot.

To others, Ross might have been considered shy. She was only really loud and outgoing around her friends, for good reasons. The girls at school thought she was weird for hanging out with only boys, which frankly made no sense to her considering all those girls did was *talk* about boys. And the other boys at the school were alright, but made her slightly uncomfortable. Maybe it was because she had found her place within The Party's ranks, and thought it would be considered cheating to talk to other boys. Or, maybe it was because Troy was constantly calling her a Leprechaun, which didn't bug Ross much because it was rather unoriginal, but to say it didn't make her self conscious around other boys would be a lie.

So she was quiet, for the most part. She didn't say much, no one really heard her talk unless they were listening in on a conversation she was having with Mike, Will, Dustin, or Lucas, or if she was talking to a teacher. The only time people ever saw her get worked up though, was when Troy Harrington reared his ugly head. She was constantly ready to fight him, whether it was verbally, or physically(although that kind of fight had yet to happen). If Troy even *looked* in the direction of her or the boys, she was all clenched fists and nasty comments, ready for a trip to the principal's office if things went south. They usually did.

Shoving her bike into the bike rack, she quickly ran over to her friends, glaring at Harrington's back as he sauntered away. Mike was saying something about super powers, but all she really cared about was what Troy had said to them.

"What did he say?" she asked, stopping next to Dustin as he picked up his backpack. "Did he push you? Why is your backpack on the ground? Did he make you do the thing? I swear to god-"

"It's fine, Ross," Lucas said, taking on the tone he always did when she spoke about Troy, like it was something she shouldn't concern herself with. "Just the usual. Nothing to get worked up over."

"Nothing to get worked up over?" Ross asked incredulously, ignoring the wary looks Mike and Dustin sent to each other. "He's a racist piece of shit, Lucas."

Lucas looked away from her, something he also did whenever she mentioned racism. She knew it wasn't because he didn't like to talk about it, because he would often rant about it in Mike's basement, but she still couldn't pick out *why* he did it. And he only did it when she talked about it. The other boys had no answers for her, either.

"I know you don't like it when I say it," she said, holding up a hand before he could either tell her to stop talking or change the subject. "But it's true and we all know it. Plus, he's homophobic, too. Like, I know Will's not gay, but even if he *was* Troy has no right to treat him badly. And making fun of Dustin for his hyper-thing-I-can't-pronounce? Or calling Mike a frog? Like, honestly, if anyone's the frog it's him. He's ugly *and* slimy, and I bet someone would get warts even if he *touched* them. And-"

"We get it," Dustin said, putting a hand on her shoulder. "You don't like him-"

"I *detest* him."

"And you're dad detests your trips to the principal's office," Mike reminded her.

"And you being late," Lucas added. "So we should go before we *all* are."

Ross huffed, but nonetheless followed as Mike prodded her forward.

She didn't question Will's absence until they stopped at their lockers to put away their uneeded books. The boys told her he was already at class, he had gone to school early.

"Oh, did Miss B drive him in?" Ross asked, shutting her locker and trotting over to Lucas, who was only three lockers down from her.

"No," Lucas said. "She actually didn't know where Will was at first. Thought he had spent the night at Mike's."

"Oh," Ross frowned. She looked over to Mike, who was waiting by Dustin at his locker, which was farther down the hall. "I didn't see his bike in the racks."

Lucas paused, furrowing his eyebrows. "I didn't, either. Maybe he put it in the racks on the South side of the school?"

She shrugged.

"Maybe."

As it turned out, Lucas was wrong. All the boys were. Will had not gone to class early, because he hadn't gone at all.

As the bell rang, Ross waited for the other kids to rush out of the classroom, like they always did, ignoring Mr. Clarke's last few words. Of course, she ignored them, too, and opted to shoving all of her books into her bag while he talked.

It was probably just about what they were covering tomorrow, or the test she vaguely remembered him mentioning at the beginning of class. She'd lost thought of it after he delved deeper into what ever they'd been talking about. Ross tuned out about after five minutes of trying to listen. She truly didn't understand any of it. Even when she tried, even when the boys attempted to help her study, and even when she stayed after school everyday for a week in hopes of Mr. Clarke being able to help her fully grasp the concepts. Needless to say, it didn't work.

Lazily, she stood from her desk to stand next to the boys in front of Mr. Clarke's desk. It'd been requested that she stay with them after class, because some new equipment for their AV Club had come in, and considering Ross was part of said club, her presence was sort of required.

Not to say she wasn't excited. No, she was. Even though she wasn't as invested in it as the boys, or as privy as to how it all worked, she still

thought it was cool. And the equipment that was coming was supposed to be big. It was supposed to be more efficient with a larger range. Upon hearing of it's impending arrival two weeks ago, Dustin and her had finally gotten together to learn some trucker codes, like they'd always wanted to do, incase they stumbled upon a conversation that seemed particularly interesting.

"So, did it come?" Mike asked with a smile. Lucas was practically bouncing in his spot, and Dustin was beeming as well. Even Ross had put on a smile, but it quickly fell as Mr. Clarke's face turned sober.

"Sorry, boys, Ross," Mr. Clarke said quietly. "I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but..."

He trailed off, looking at their dejected expressions before he suddenly grinned, leaning forward slightly. "It came!"

Almost immediately Ross was being ushered out of the classroom by her three comrades, and she followed them with glee to their very own AV Club room.

On the way, she remembered that Will was not with them. The Byers boy had also been looking forward to the new equipment, and she could only imagine how excited he would have been were he there.

His absence was unsettling to her. According to what the boys had told her at recess, Miss Byers had called Mike's mom that morning, asking if Will had spent the night. He had not. Joyce had told Mrs. Wheeler that he must have left for school early, something he did every so often. But, obviously, Will had not gone to school early.

The only reasoning that Ross could come up with was that Will had skipped. But, it didn't make much sense, because not only had Will never skipped before, but he also *wouldn't* ever skip. He liked school, and learning, and being with his friends. She couldn't come up with a liable explanation as to *why* he would skip. What would make him do so? Was it-

""I bet we could talk to New York on this thing, Ross," Lucas said, interrupting her thoughts and putting them all away at the mention of the infamous city.

She'd always thought wanting to go to New York was cheesy, thought it was just some small town kid cliche, until they took a field trip to the city and she was fascinated by the bustling streets and variety of people.

"Seriously?" Ross asked, stepping up next to the desk that was holding blue machinery. Dustin was spinning some dial while Mike fiddled with the headphones and placed them over his ears.

"Think bigger," Mr. Clarke said from behind Lucas, holding his hands up in front of him.

"Mars," Ross quipped jokingly.

"Er, smaller," Mr. Clarke corrected her, smiling.

"California?" Lucas asked.

"Bigger."

"Australia?" Mike asked in astonishment, which only grew as their science teacher nodded.

The boys turned back to the equipment with an intense curiosity and excitement for the things they could do and the places they could reach. Ross smiled, at their expressions, which so clearly expressed their passion for the AV kit.

"When Will sees this, he's totally gonna blow his shit!" Lucas exclaimed suddenly, apparently forgetting the presence of the adult behind him.

"Lucas!" Mr. Clarke reprimanded, crossing his arms. Ross glanced at Mr. Clarke from the corner of her eye, hiding a smile at his stern look that was usually directed at *her*.

"Sorry," Lucas muttered, sheepishly, turning the strict expression Mr. Clarke had to one of endearment. Dustin giggled and Ross quickly rounded the table to stand next to him, watching as the Lucas and Mike fiddled with some of the knobs.

Mike leaned forward to the mic, opening his mouth and letting loose

an Australian accent that made Ross laugh, "Hello, this is Mike Wheeler, President of Hawkins Middle AV club."

Ross snorted and Dustin quickly picked the headphone off of Mike and put them on his own head. Mike leaned over to make room and Dustin grinned, leaving Lucas to question what he was doing.

"Hello, this is Dustin, and this is the secretary and treasurer of Hawkins Middle AV Club, do you eat kangaroos for breakfast?"

Ross quickly clapped for them both. "10 out of 10 accents," she praised, rolling her eyes as Dustin gave her a short bow.

Just as Lucas moved to take the headphones, there was a sharp rapt on the door. They all turned to see their principal, Mr. Coleman, and some men Ross recognized to be police officers behind him in the hall.

"Sorry to interrupt," Mr. Coleman said, holding a hand out to Mr. Clarke," but, uh, may I borrow Miss King and the boys?"

It was official. Will Byers was missing.

Ross looked between the boys and the police officers, silently stressing out and wondering how long it would take before the big cop's patience wore thin. The boys were talking restlessly on the couch, all at once, their words too quick and jumbled together for anyone in the room to make out a coherent sentence, much less make sense of it. Ross had been contributing to that mess of a conversation from her chair at first as well, before she saw the rather annoyed look the big cop held.

He was obviously more important than other cops, which Mr. Coleman proved to be true by introducing him as Sheriff Jim Hopper. While their uniform was blue, his was tan, and he even got a fancy hat to go with it. He was tall and a bit chunky, but could pass as buff if you squinted your eyes, something Ross wasn't very surprised to see a cop look like (the chunkiness courtesy of their donuts), but the illusion of safety a cop would usually provide was shattered by the bad mood he seemed to be in. The expression looked so natural on

his face, Ross wouldn't have been surprised to learn his was in a bad mood all the time.

It was clear he was in one now. He held up his hand, closing his eyes like the boys's voices were giving him a headache. "Okay, okay, okay," he said loudly, cutting off their chatter in one go. "One at a time, all right."

He looked to Mike. "You."

Mike nodded, eyes wide and waiting for a question.

"You said he takes what?"

"Mirkwood," Mike supplied quickly.

"Mirkwood?" Hopper asked skeptically. He turned to his partner, asking in a low voice, "Have you ever heard of Mirkwood?"

"I have not. That sounds made up to me."

"No," Lucas spoke up. "It's from *Lord of the Rings."*

"Well, *The Hobbit,"* Dustin corrected. Ross furrowed her eyebrows and gave him a look that was a almost identical to Mike's, while Lucas turned to him slowly.

"It doesn't matter," he quipped, shaking his head.

"He asked!"

"He asked!" Lucas mocked.

"Shut up, guys," Mike said quickly, catching sight of the expression of Hopper's face as Lucas and Dustin quickly fell into an argument.

"Hey, hey, hey! What'd I just say?" He asked, leaning forward. "One at a damn time."

He nodded to Mike again. "You."

"Mirkwood, it's a real road," Mike began. "It's just the name that's made up. Ross takes it to her house, too."

"It's where Cornwallis and Kerley meet," Ross provided as his gaze turned to her.

"Yeah, all right, I think I know that-"

"We can show you, if you want," Mike offered.

Hopper rolled his eyes and leaned back. "I said that I know it!"

Mike sat up straighter. "We can help look."

"Yeah," Dustin agreed under his breath.

"No," Hopper said in exasperation, shaking his head.

The boys got rowdy for a good second before Hopper shut them down again with the wave of his hand and another "no".

"After school, you are all to go home," he instructed. "Immediately. That means no hiking around looking for your friend, no investigating, no nonsense. This isn't some *Lord of the Rings* book."

"*The Hobbit,"* Dustin corrected.

"Shut up!" Lucas hissed, reaching across Mike to slap Dustin's thigh. Dustin paused, letting out a short breath before retaliating, smacking Lucas back.

"Stop it!" Mike demanded as the two began to fight with him in the crossfire. Hopper leaned forward, his expression stern and final.

"Do I make myself clear?" he asked quietly. The boys quit fighting, and leaned back as Hopper stood up in a way that the four kids saw slightly threatening. "Do I make myself...clear?"

They all nodded, muttering agreements under their breaths. Hopper nodded back. "Good. Get out."

Ross jumped up from the spare chair and started towards the door, before Hopper pointed at her with the shake of his head. "You, stay."

The boys hesitated and watched as her expression dropped and she

slumped back into the chair like a rag doll. She gave them one last parting glance before they were ushered out the door by Mr. Coleman.

Ross kept quiet, sitting up straight as Hopper angled his chair to face her and Mr. Coleman sat on the couch.

"He said you take the same road?" Hopper asked, referring to Mike. Instantly, Ross cursed Mike in her head for mentioning it. Now she had to be interrogated privately, which she didn't want to do at all. It made her nervous. What if they accused her of murdering Will?

Slow down there, she thought. *You're getting dramatic. They just need to ask you questions to help find Will. You want to find Will, so help.*

"Yeah," she said. "My house is just a bit farther out than his."

"You go home with him last night?" Hopper asked ."Since you take the same road?"

Ross shook her head. "No. I wanted to, but my dad came to pick me up," she answered. "He doesn't want me to ride my bike at night because, well...for exactly this reason, I suppose."

Hopper nodded.

"Did Will leave before you? Did you happen to see anything on the way home?"

Ross shook her head.

He sighed, running a hand over his face while nodding.

"Alright," he said, looking to her now like he was about to deliver instructions. "Okay, don't take that road home, not alone. Call your dad and have him pick you up from school."

"My dad isn't home," Ross said quietly. "He left town for work, won't be back until tomorrow."

"What about your mom?" the other cop spoke up dumbly. Ross shook her head.

"Miss King's only got her father," Mr. Coleman quickly intervened. He turned to Ross, a questioning look on his face. "Your dad left you alone for the night?"

Shit.

"Usually, he wouldn't," Ross lied. "But it was short notice. Usually I stay at Will's, but..."

She trailed off, watching as the adults traded looks.

"Is there anyone else you could stay with?" Hopper asked her.

She shrugged. "Mike's, maybe. Mrs. Wheeler told my dad that if I ever need somewhere to stay I was welcomed there."

That wasn't far from the truth. Ross stayed the night at Mike's often. Mrs. Wheeler constantly reminded her she could come over whenever she wanted because she was "practically family".

"Could you call his mom?" Hopper asked Mr. Coleman while he stood up. "Ask if she can stay till David gets back."

Mr. Coleman nodded and headed towards the phone, while the other cop started towards the door. Hopper looked at Ross, giving her a stern look. "I meant what I said. No exploring."

"Alright," Ross nodded.

He nodded back. "I'm trusting you to keep those boys in line."

Disclaimer: I don't own the ideas, plot, or characters of Stranger Things

A/N: Hey all, it's been a bit, hasn't it? Whoops, lol. Anywho, here's chapter 2. Not much to say except I literally just finished it. Sorry for any grammar mistakes anywhere! If you have any suggestions or comments, leave a review! I hope you like it!

-blockthewriter

3. Chapter 3

After the bell rang for the last class of the day, Ross's teacher asked her to stay behind for a moment. A million reasons as to why ran through her head. They found Will and the search was off. She was being sent to the office for drawing on desks in class again. Someone saw her flip off Troy Harrington after lunch and reported her. They found Will dead somewhere in the woods. They found evidence proving her to be the reason Will was gone, that some how here taking a ride with her dad was the irrevocable trigger that had set Will's fate in stone.

However, when the teacher simply told her she was to go home with Mike Wheeler, she wondered how she could have gotten so worked up. She supposed she was on edge now. Jumpy and worried, for Will. He was *actually missing.* Those kinds of things only happened in the movies. Just a few days ago life had seemed normal, like nothing as bad as a missing or kidnapped boy could ever happen to them.

They were obviously wrong.

Ross waited at the bike rack for the boys to come out, watching the other kids to by and wondering how they would react when their parents told them that a boy from their class was missing. Did he run away? Did he get lost? Or was he kidnapped? Was he dead? Was whoever tool him still out there, searching for his next victim? Could they all be in danger, at risk of being stolen away on their way home from school?

She looked up as she heard the familiar voices of the boys, and shielded the sun from here eyes as Dustin called out to her.

"So? What did he ask you?" he questioned eagerly. Him, along with the other boys, had tried to ask her many times throughout the day, but either they were interuppted or she told them she would tell them later. "Why did he have to talk to you alone?"

She didn't say anything, didn't even have time to respond before Lucas was asking her if she was in trouble at all.

"No," she shook her head, not bothering to roll her eyes at the accusation which she would have normally done. "Not in trouble. They just asked if I was with Will and stuff, since Mike said we take the same road."

The four of them didn't say anything for a moment, all of them wrapping their head around the fact that Ross could have very well been there with Will when he went missing, although the three boys for a different reason than Ross. Ross was thinking how she could have maybe prevented Will's disappearance. The boys were thinking how she could have very well been included in that disappearance, too.

But no one was willing to mention it.

Instead, Dustin offered Ross a hand and heaved her to her feet.

"Mr. Coleman stopped me and said you were coming home with me," Mike said, although his time suggest it was more of a question rather than a statement. Ross nodded, wiping off any dirt that might have stuck to the back of her pants.

"The Hopper guy told me to call my dad and have him bring me home instead of going by myself, but my dad's off at work, so they called your mom and asked if I could stay with you tonight."

"Your dad's off at work again?" Lucas asked curiously. Ross nodded. None of them actually knew what kind of job her father had. She had a vague understanding of it, but she had never bothered to ask him for more detail or to explain it to the boys.

"Mr. Coleman didn't seem too happy to find that he usually left me home alone," she told them all, shrugging. "So I told them that I usually stay at Will's, but...you know."

Again, they lapsed into an uncomfortable silence, all think of their friend and resisting the sudden urge to cry. None of it seemed quite real, but the fact that it was already taking affected on the things they did only seemed to pull them out of the clouds a bit. And those clouds were beginning to rain.

Ross climbed on to her bike, and the boys all followed suit.

Will should have been there with them. He would probably be talking about the quiz they had today, or the new equipment for the AV Club. Dustin wondered if Will would be asking for the comic book that he had stowed away in his backpack, ready to give him.

They all looked at each other, their thoughts begging the silent question that they all seemed to understand but didn't know the answer to.

Mike was the only one to guess at what it was, his hope offering them a sense of security they all knew wouldn't last as long as they wanted it to. "He's okay," he whispered, and yet in their ears it all sounded like a scream.

"We should be out there right now!" Mike exclaimed. "We should be helping look for him!"

Ross shoved her food around with her fork, mildly regretting the decision to sit on the end of the table next to Mike and his father. Mike was angry and his dad's nonchalant attitude was getting on her nerves. It was like the man didn't care. She should have sat on the other end next to Holly and Nancy.

"We've been over this, Mike," Mrs Wheeler told her son, spoon feeding her youngest daughter some food. "The chief says-"

"I don't *care* what the chief says!"

"Michael!"

They had been over it. Practically as soon as they had gotten in the house Mike had been all over his mom, begging her to let the boys come over so they could all go out to look for Will. Mrs Wheeler had hugged them both, ignoring Mike's demand, and asked them to explain what happened when the cops questioned them. They both mentioned Hopper telling them not to go out, and it was enough to nail the decision of not letting them leave the house into her brain. She said no to Mike leaving the house, and said no to the boys

coming over if it meant they would just *plan* to leave the house, and told them to go do their homework.

Mike, of course, had been angry. He dragged Ross up to his room and they tried to work on their math together, but didn't get anything done because every few seconds Mike would curse out about his mom's ignorance to Will's disappearance.

He seemed to abandon the thought of Will being okay nearly as soon as Dustin and Lucas left their side, and began to admit that Will would be in danger. He could have a limited amount of time left, and if they didn't go out to find them they might *never* see him again. He started to cry after saying that thought out loud, and him and Ross had hugged it out for a good twenty minutes until he clarified that he was okay. He had gone from angry, to sad, to decidedly calm all in one go, but now that they were sat at the dinner table to anger had come back.

"We have to do something!" Mike pleaded. "Will can be in danger!"

"More reason to stay put," Mrs Wheeler claimed. "Why do you think Mr Coleman called to have Ross stay? If I won't let Ross go home in *broad daylight* by herself, what makes you think I'll let *you* go out at *night* by yourself?"

"Mom!" Mike complained.

"End of discussion," Mrs Wheeler said firmly, leaving Mike with a disgruntled expression. She glanced to Ross, who was avoiding eye contact; to Nancy, who only raised her eyebrows in return; then to her husband, waiting for some back up that never came.

There were a few moments of silence before Nancy spoke up, her voice hesitant and trying. "So...me and Barbara are gonna study at her house tonight. That's cool, right?"

Mrs Wheeler closed her eyes and took a moment to herself, before looking to her daughter and shaking her head. "No. Not cool."

Nancy looked surprised and offended at her mother's response, like she had genuinely thought she wouldn't deny Nancy the right to go

out and study.

"What? Why not?" she demanded, suddenly very annoyed.

"Why do you think?" Mrs Wheeler snapped. "An I speaking Chinese in this house? Until we know Will is okay, *no one* leaves."

"This is such bullshit!" Nancy exclaimed.

For the first time since they stumbled upon the conversation, Mr Wheeler spoke. The input he had decided to offer was to scold Nancy over cursing. "Language." He didn't even sound like he cared about *that* either.

"So we're under house arrest?" Nancy asked angrily. "Just because their friend got lost on the way home from school?"

It was the wrong thing to say. Mike's head snapped in Nancy's direction so fast he probably gave himself whiplash, and Ross dropped her fork straight into her food.

"He's not lost, he takes that road all the time!" Ross exclaimed the same time Mike asked, "Wait, so this is *Will's* fault?"

Mrs Wheeler fixed Nancy with as stern look. "Nancy, take it back."

"No!" Nancy exclaimed.

"You're just pissed off cause you wanna hang out with Steve!" Mike said, immediately tensing up at the whithering glare Nancy fixed him with.

Mr Wheeler was suddenly interested in what his kids had to say. "Steve?"

"Who is Steve?" Mrs Wheeler asked.

"Her new boyfriend!" Mike told them quickly.

"You are such douchebag, Mike!" Nancy snapped at him.

"Language!" Me Wheeler reprimanded.

Nancy groaned loudly, and stood up from the table to storm out of the room. Ross glanced at Mike to see him grinning behind his fist at her departure.

"Nancy, come back!" Mrs Wheeler called out. "Come back!"

She sighed, the weight of parenting weighing down on her not for the first time but in a decidedly different situation from normal. She turned her attention to Holly, who was looking nervously around the table. "It's okay. It's okay, Holly. Here, have some juice, okay?"

Mr Wheeler looked up from his chicken and to Mike. "You see, Michael?" he asked. "You see what happens?"

"See what happens when *what?"* Mike yelled at his dad. "I'm the only one acting normal here! Me and Ross are the only ones who care about Will!"

"That's really unfair, son," Mr Wheeler said, gesturing to Mike with his chicken. "We care."

If he did care, it certainly didn't show.

Ross decided she wouldn't trade her own alcoholic, angry, and dysfunctional father for Mike's boring, careless, deadbeat dad for a million bucks.

She watched as Mike gave Mr Wheeler an exasperated look, suddenly feeling bad about the thought as he slammed his hands on the table and left.

"Mike!" Mrs Wheeler called out, much like she had to Nancy.

"Let him go," Mr Wheeler said flatly. Mrs Wheeler turn and gave him an incredulous look before turning to Ross.

"I'm sorry, Ross, honey," she said kindly, glancing from the girl to the two empty seats at the table. "This isn't how we wanted you to spend your night here. You can go to the basement, if you'd like."

Ross jumped to her feet, taking the invitation eagerly to escape the awkwardness that brimmed around the room. "Thank you, Mrs

Wheeler."

She made her way to the basement door and closed it behind her, flicking the light on so she could see where she was stepping. She paused when she heard Mrs Wheeler's voice, angry and sarcastic.

"I hope you're enjoying your chicken, Ted."

"What'd I do? Hey! What'd I do?"

Mike had waited for his dad to retreated back to the living room to go down to the basement, lest he try and give him another lecture that held no emotion and no meaning other than *I'm you're dad so I have authority.*

When he dashed down his steps, his jacket already slung over his arm and his back pack on the other, he stopped at the sight of Ross sitting on the couch, let's crossed and an old picture in her hands. He watched for a moment, before tossing his jacket and bag on the table to sit next to her.

She'd been there when he had cried, so it was only fair he would be there when she cried, even if it took a bit for the dams to give way. They always had each other backs.

"Are you okay?" he asked her, watching as she ran her thumb over the picture. It was all of them on Halloween a few years back. They were all in front of Lucas's house, grinning with empty pillowcases over their shoulders.

She waited a moment before speaking, fiddling with the corner of the picture. "It isn't about me," she told him. "It's Will."

"I just talked with Dustin and Lucas," he said. "We're all going out to look for him together at Mirkwood."

Ross turned to look up at him, her seagreen eyes narrowing slightly. "But Chief Hopper-"

"We have to go look for him, Ross," Mike interrupted, already knowing what she was going to say. "Will could be in danger! I know

you want to go help find him, too."

"I know," she sighed, looking away from him and back down to the photo. "But Hopper told me to keep you guys in line."

Mike laid a hand on her shoulder and smiled, but she didn't look up at him. "What better was to do that than going with us and making sure we don't get in to trouble?"

"We wouldn't *have* to go out if-" She abruptly cut herself off, the quick words biting into the air between them. She set the photo down and ran her hands over her face and through her hair.

"If what?" he asked her quietly, smile fading. "If *what,* Ross?"

There was a beat of silence and she sniffled miserably. And *there* were the tears.

"If I had gone with him," she said ruefully.

Mike leaned in to her and hugged her tightly. "Ross, it's not your fault."

She shook him off, though, and stood up, walking until she was on the other side of the table while saying, "If I had been there, maybe he wouldn't have gone missing!"

Her voice cracked and Mike felt like crying again.

"Or you would have gone missing, too!" He tried to reason, standing up, as well.

"But at least he wouldn't be alone!" she cried, throwing her hands up. "He's out there *alone,* Mike. Alone and scared, and I should have been there for him. I should have ridden on my bike anyway-"

"You're dad wouldn't have let you."

"Then I should have offered him a ride home," she said next, crossing her arms as he stepped in front of her.

"He wouldn't have taken it."

"I should have made him!" she exclaimed.

Mike stepped forward and grabbed her shoulders, shaking her rather roughly for a few seconds, like maybe that would knock the crazy ideas out of her head. "There is *nothing* you could have done, Ross. There is nothing you *should* have done, because it wouldn't have changed what happened. It is *not* your fault, and Will *is* going to be okay. We're going to find him."

Ross sniffed, uncrossing her arms so she could wipe some tears from her face.

"What if we don't?"

"We will, I promise you."

She stared at him for a moment before holding her pinky out between them. "Pinky promise?"

He let go of her to intertwine their pinkies together.

"Pinky promise."

Ross shook their joined hands, like that set the promise in stone, before letting go to hug him. He hugged her back, waiting patiently for her to gather her bearings.

When she pulled away and wiped her eyes one last time, he grinned.

"Alirght, now, grab a coat," he told her. "It's supposed to rain tonight."

Disclaimer: I do not know the characters, ideas, or plot of Stranger Things

candy95: Thanks for the review! And sorry for taking so long to update, again. Hopefully it'll get better. And thanks, yeah, I'm trying to expand more at my writing and on the story itself by adding more scenes that obviously didn't appear in the show. I'm glad you like it!

LIsa: AHHHHHHH! I don't know why you're screaming but I'll take it as a good sign. So yeah, thanks for the review!

A/N: And I'm back after...forever. Ish. Super sorry about the wait. I've not been doing much of anything lately, aside from homework and nothing. I really have no excuse as to why this isn't out sooner. Hah, whoops. I'm trying to get back in the grove and will hopefully have another chapter out soon, some day. In the meantime, please forgive me for any grammar mistake or spelling errors, leave any comments you might have, and enjoy!

- blockthewriter

4. Chapter 4

After Ross pulled on her jacket, then put on one of Nancy's old raincoats over top, she helped Mike pack a book bag of anything they might need. A flashlight, a blanket for Will, some food for Will, a small umbrella before Mike told her it was broken (how convienent) and took it out, and a few other items.

Once that was all done they were tiptoeing up the stairs and past the living room, where Mr Wheeler was snoring soundly, into the garage and grabbing their bikes. Mike lifted the garage door by himself as slowly and as noiselessly as possible, while Ross slid their bikes underneath, then held the door for Mike to crawl under. When she set it down, she dropped it too soon, and it banged against the ground with a clatter. She winced, quickly looking over to Mike, who was too busy freezing in his spot than to glare at her for being an idiot.

After a moment, when no lights turned on in the house and when neither of Mike's parents burst into sight with the fury of one who has been betrayed, they righted their bikes and climbed on.

Mike flicked on his light, and nodded for Ross to follow him down the drive. After a moment, however, Mike slows to a stop and Ross follows suit, wondering what he was doing. She saw him turn and look past her, to his house, so she followed his gaze.

And *man* was it a sight.

Steve Harrington, of all people, Nancy's boyfriend, douchebag according to Lucas but dreamy according to Ross, was trying to *climb* onto the Wheeler's roof. As if sensing their prying eyes, Steve turned, catching sight of the two younger kids. He leaned against the house, his body language acting like he *hadn't* been caught sneaking in to the house they were sneaking out of. But his face looked guilty and awkward-because-i-was-caught, as he glanced from them, to the house, then back again.

Ross couldn't help it. She let out a sigh, cocking her head at the high schooler who waved in their direction. Beside her, Mike rolled his

eyes at her reaction, made a disapproving noise, and started to pedal forward again.

"Don't 'urgh' me," Ross said, looking away from Steve and pedalling after him. "He might be related to Shithead Harrington, but he's still good looking."

"He's dating my sister," Mike said with disgust, unsure on whether that disgust was aimed towards Steve for dating Nancy, or at Nancy for dating Steve.

"I know," she said with a grin. "Doesn't mean I can't admire him from afar."

Mike groaned again, throwing his head back in exaggeration, but he was secretly happy that Ross no longer seemed upset. If her school girl crush was enough to keep her relatively happy, then he would take it. Ross laughed at his reaction, and he glanced to her with a small smile.

"Come on, we gotta hurry. Lucas said he would meet us in ten minutes."

"Ah, man. This is it."

The four them, Lucas, Mike, Dustin, and Ross, all skidded to a stop at Lucas's words, right in front of a roadblock positioned to the side of the road. They were on Mirkwood, and the roadblock must have been where Will went off the road, and where they found his bike.

Ross suddenly felt nervous and scared. What if they didn't find Will? What if the reason Will went missing was out there waiting for them, too?

Next to her, Dustin sighed heavily, and she had a feeling he was thinking the same thing as her. Above them, thunder rumbled, and Ross was glad she brought her raincoat.

"Hey, guys," Dustin said, looking up towards the sky. Going in to the woods where one of his dear friends went missing was creepy enough. He didn't need to be wet while he was at it. "You feel that?"

He lifted up a hand, feeling the small raindrop that would fall every odd moment.

No one said anything. Lucas and Ross spared him a glance, but Mike ignored him completely and put his kickstand up, taking a step towards the roadblock. He was only focused on one thing.

"I think maybe we should go back."

Mike turned to face him, waving his flashlight around, his attention snatched up by Dustin's suggestion. "No. We're not going back. Just stay close." He moved forward, decision set in stone, and Lucas followed quickly. "Come on."

Ross moved to stand by Dustin, watching as Lucas and Mike ducked underneath be roadblock with ease.

"We go in, we get Will, we get out," Ross said aloud, although Dustin figured she was saying it more to herself than to him.

"Just stay on channel six," Mike called to them. Then, as an after thought, "Don't do anything stupid."

As if Mike's words were the invisible force that nudged Ross into action, she quickly moved to catch up with them, ducking under the tape and following their footsteps.

She fell into pace next to Lucas, pulling her hood up as thunder rumbled again. Next to her obvious yearn to find Will, what really pushed her past her hesitation was the fact that she had no flashlight. Sure, Dustin had one, but she figured that two flashlights were better than one. Besides, if they all went in to the forest, Dustin was bound to follow.

True to her thoughts, behind them Dustin called for them to wait up. She heard his bike clatter to the ground and they all turned and waited as he jogged down to them, his fear of being alone overriding his fear of whatever was waiting for them.

Since they left their bikes and headed into the forest, the rain only started to come down harder. They were all clutching their coats to

themselves and constantly wiping the rain from their eyes. None of them would admit, but they jumped every time the thunder rumbled.

"Will!" Mike yelled loudly, trying to make his voice be heard through the downpour. "Will!"

"Byers!" Lucas called next, followed by Dustin's shout of, "I've got your X-Men 134!"

The three boys were all about a foot or two in front of her. Since they had the flashlights, they led, and Ross followed behind closely. It was still hard to see where they were going, and the rain definitely didn't help, so rather than prying her eyes in the dark, she kept a close eye on the boys' feet, trying to step where they stepped.

She looked up for a moment, scanning her eyes through the rain for Will, but without a flashlight she couldn't see a thing. "Come on, Will!" she yelled. "It's us!"

After a moment, when Will didn't jump out of the brush at them, soaked and freezing, Dustin spoke up, his voice carrying to them all through the rain.

"Guys, I really think we should turn back."

"Seriously, Dustin?" Lucas snapped, tired of hearing Dustin complain since they got to Mirkwood. "You wanna be a baby, then go home already!"

"I'm just being realistic, Lucas!" Dustin defended himself.

"No, you're just being a big sissy!"

"Did you ever think Will went missing because he ran into something bad?" Dustin asked heavily. Ross glanced up at his back, miffed that he would suggest such a thing, and also because he was voicing her very concerns out loud. The fact that he agreed with her thoughts didn't make her feel better about them.

"Will is fine," Ross interjected, even though she knew that Dustin heard her but wasn't really listening. "We're gonna find him."

"What if we're going to the exact same spot where he was last seen?" Dustin asked them. "And we have no weapons or anything?"

"Dustin," Mike said. "Shut up."

"I'm just saying, does that seem smart to you?"

Mike stopped, suddenly, and the rest of them stopped, too, wondering why Mike held his hands up in front of Dustin and Lucas and stared ahead of him.

"Shut up, shut up," he hissed at them. "Did you hear that?"

Then, Ross heard a rustling in the trees, and it was evident the boys did, too. They all spun around, and the boys aimed their flashlights in front of them warily. Ross suddenly got goosebumps, and her heart rate seemed to pick up.

Fuck.

What if whatever it was was the thing that had taken Will?

There was another rustling sound, but behind them this time, and they all spun again, their hearts jumping up into their throats. None of them said a word as they peered where the light allowed them, too. It seemed all too possible that they weren't going to make it out of that forest on their terms, with Will by their side.

Ross heard something snap behind her, possibly a twig, and turned, bumping into something very solid. She heard a small gasp come from whatever, or more like *whoever* it was. She supposed her first instinct should have been to back away, but the gasp sounded too young for it to be any kidnapper. In fact, it sounded a lot like-

"Will?" she asked.

She reached out to the silhouette in front of her, grabbing onto what she guess was an arm. As soon as she grabbed it though, it was ripped out of her grasp and she was pushed towards the ground.

She screamed, which she would later deny, because Will definitely wouldn't push her and because she could swear that nothing had

actually touched her when she was pushed down. She felt no pressure on any specific part of her body or any physical contact, but she felt it more like an invisible force shoving her backwards.

Instantly, light flashed above her as the boys spun around to look for her, and they all gasped at the same time.

She was right, it hadn't been Will who had pushed her, nor had it been a kidnapper. Not if that kidnapper was around her age.

At first sight, she thought it was a boy, but then realized it was only a girl with her hair shaved. She was pale, obviously cold, and was wearing only a large yellow t-shirt. She wiped her nose as they shined the light in her eyes, and her expression seemed to be a mix of nervous and scared, but not scared enough to turn around and haul ass away from them.

Ross scrambled back, because her mind was still reeling and her heart was still beating too fast, and also because even if it was just a girl, that girl had still pushed her down without touching her, and she was strange and someone none of them had ever seen before. In her haste backwards, she ran into Lucas's feet, and he reached down and hauled her to her feet by her jacket, pulling her in between him and Mike.

None of the boys took their eyes off the girl, though. They were all shocked.

They had walked into that maze of trees to find their friend, and instead found a girl that definitely wasn't Will.

Not by a long shot.

Practically as soon as they ran into the girl, they retreated out of the forest and back to Mike's house. She rode on the back of Mike's bike, mainly because he was the only one willing to let her. She had his jacket, too, after he realized that she was only wearing a giant t-shirt out in the rain.

When they got back to the house, they didn't even bother with

putting their bikes inside, and left them out in the rain. Mike snuck them all in through the back door, and they all dashed towards the basement, hustling the confused girl along with them.

So there they were, standing up around the couch, in wet clothes and running thoughts, an array of expressions on all of their faces. The girl sat in front of them, on the couch. Even though they'd been inside for at least five minutes, she was breathing as if she'd just gotten back from sprinting a few laps around the house. She was soaked, too, Mike's jacket enveloping her small frame as she looked down at the table.

Ross noticed that she didn't seem scared. If she was, she was good at hiding it. No, instead she looked at them like *they* were the strange ones. And Ross supposed that to her, they might have been strange. After all, who finds a bald girl in the woods and decides to take her home with them?

"Is there a number we can call for your parents?" Mike asked her. She flicked her eyes over to him, but didn't answer.

She hadn't said a word to any of them since they first found her. Maybe she was mute? Or just scared?

"Where's your hair?" Dustin asked. Ross, of course, wasn't surprised. If anyone could managed to drag them off topic, it was going to be him. "Do you have cancer?"

Ross gave him a look, shaking her head softly as Lucas decided to jump in with a question.

"Did you run away?"

"Are you in some kind of trouble?" Mike asked.

"Is that blood?"

Ross's attention was fully caught as Lucas leaned forwards and reached his arm towards her, aiming to point at a red stain on her shirt. She merely leaned back, and Mike swatted Lucas's arm away, but Lucas was right. It *was* blood.

"Stop it!" Mike said. "You're freaking her out!"

Lucas gave Mike an incredulous look, gesturing towards the girl with his hand. "*She's* freaking *me* out!"

Ross would have to agree.

"I bet she's deaf," Dustin said, stopping the argument Mike and Lucas were about to have in it's tracks. While Ross was thankful for the distraction, she was nearly disappointed at the assumption.

If the girl was deaf, she would've found some way to tell them. Not hearing or understanding what people are saying is *probably* more likely to send one into a panic in any other case, especially when one's been stumbled upon in the woods by four kids with flashlights.

"Dustin," Ross said with a sigh, shaking her head as he leaned towards her with his hands up.

He clapped straight in the girl's face, which was utterly pointless, because regardless if she could hear him or not, she wasn't blind and could clearly see him coming. The girl leaned back quickly, again, not looking alarmed but just more weirded out.

Dustin stood straight again, looking thoroughly dejected. "Not deaf."

Mike waved his hands, obviously having enough with all of it. "Alright, that's enough, okay?"

He looked to the girl, and Ross could see some underlying emotion in his eyes, one she couldn't pin point and defintely couldn't relate to. "She's just scared and cold."

And totally not creepy, right.

For some reason, Mike seemed to be missing the bigger picture. They'd gone into those woods to find Will, and not only did they come out unsuccessful, but they brought a strange girl along with them. Yes, Ross agreed that they probably shouldn't question her too much or frighten her, but Mike seemed all too...not right about the situation.

It seemed more that he had shoved the thought of Will being gone to the side and replaced it with the girl. Like he was distracting himself to the actual situation.

Ross, personally, didn't very much care if they got in trouble. Well, she did because she didn't want her dad finding out, but the problem warranted more attention than that of four seventh graders. They should have went to the police, or went straight upstairs to tell Mike's parents.

Consequences be damned, this girl could possibly know something about Will disappearance, because it *couldn't* be a coincidence that she happened to show up in the same area that Will had gone missing. And their best bet into getting the information they needed out of her, *while* getting her help at the same time, was the police.

Thunder rumbled from outside, and Mike moved away from them, heading towards the laundry area.

There was more thunder, this time louder and heavier, and the girl jumped, squeezing her eyes shut tight like it would make the noises go away.

Ross glanced to Dustin and Lucas, the latter of whom was watching Mike, and the former who had his eyebrows raised at the girl's reaction.

When Mike came back he was holding some of his clothes, gray sweats and a blue sweatshirt, he held them out to the girl, and Ross agreed that changing in to dry clothes sounded like a good idea.

"Here, these are clean. Okay?"

She reached forward timidly and took the clothes, staring at them for a moment before running her hands over the fabric. She brought it up to her face and rubbed it against her cheeck, which judging from Dustin and Lucas's expression, wasn't thought to be weird by just Ross.

She put the clothes down and stood up, shrugging Mike's soaking wet onto the couch. Then, she caught all of them off guard in the wildest

way possible. She reached down, grabbed the hem of her overly large shirt, and started to lift.

Ross would have expect the same reaction if the girl had projectile vommited into their open mouths.

Immediately, all of them started shouting. It was a wonder no one upstairs heard them, but Ross wasn't her worried about how heavy of sleepers the Wheeler parents were. Mike lunged forward and grabbed her hands before she could even lift her shirt two more inches further.

"Stop!" had been the only thing Ross had to offer, next to turning her body to the left so she wouldn't be accidentally flashed.

Dustin was probably going into shock, judging that the only thing coming from his mouth was as steady stream of "oh, my god". Both him and Lucas had turned completely around and put distance between them and the girl, muttering out their protests while Ross took a quick look over to make sure Mike had stopped her.

After seeing her shirt was still on, she turned towards them fully as Mike pointed over to the bathroom.

"See over there?" If Ross hadn't of known better, she'd of thought he was talking to a child. "That's the bathroom. Privacy. Get it?"

Ross really doubted that she got it at all, judging from the blank stare Mike received. But she could pick up context clues well enough, and picked up the clothes to follow him over to the bathroom.

"Oh, my god," Dustin said one last time, just for good measure.

"She's crazy," Lucas said.

"She's just different," Ross found herself saying. "We found her in the woods, did you expect her to be normal?"

"She tried to get naked," Dustin said, like that answered the question.

"We shouldn't have brought her here," Lucas hissed. Ross agreed, but she figured that Lucas's thoughts were more cruel than her own.

"You think we should have left her out there?" she asked, although it came out as more of a statement.

"Yes!" he exclaimed, and Ross opened her mouth to argue before he quickly back tracked. "Or at least brought her somewhere else. Anywhere but our homes! What if she's a psychopath?'

"So psychopaths try to get naked?" Dustin asked.

"Does she really look like a psychopath to you?" Ross asked him. "She couldn't hurt us if she tried!" She ignored the thought of pushing without physical contact.

"She's still-"

"Hey, Ross?" Mike had cut Lucas off and stood in the doorway of the bathroom, the girl at his side. "Could you come here?"

Ross glanced to the two other boys, and when Lucas raised his eyebrows at her she finally moved towards the bathroom, contemplating why they needed her. Mike took a step towards her and away from the door, then gestured towards it with a flick of his fingers.

"Could you go in with her?"

Could she...what?

"What?"

"She doesn't want to go in alone," Mike quickly explained, at the look Ross gave him. "Or at least she wouldn't let me close the door. I think if someone went in with her she would be okay, and since you're a girl and I'm not-"

"She wouldn't let you close the door?" Ross asked, furrowing her eyebrows.

Mike glanced at her and then back to Ross. "She stopped me and said no."

Ross's eyes grew wide. "She spoke?" She looked over to the girl, well

aware of the fact that the girl could hear her and how rude she probably seemed, but then figured that judging from the way she'd been acting, the girl didn't have a grasp on manners. "I thought she was mute."

"She just said no," Mike said. "Could you go in with her? Please?"

Ross glanced from Mike to the girl, wondering for a second if he was actually serious, then deducted that he was serious and really wanted her to do this.

"I guess."

Mike gave a small smile and nodded to the girl, who stepped to the side so Ross could step into the bathroom with her. Mike closed the door behind them, slowly, like he was waiting for the girl to say something else, before just shutting it all the way with a click.

Both girls just stared at each other for a moment, waiting to see who would speak first.

Obviously, because Ross had yet to see the girl talk and would believe it when she saw it, she said the first thing. "I'll just, uh, turn around...so you can change."

She turned and faced the door, shifting her feet. It was awkward, because Ross didn't hear the girl move at all, which mean she was most likely just staring at the back of her head, which was weird.

But then finally Ross heard the shuffle of clothes as the girl started to change, and managed to relax just the tiniest bit. Maybe with her wearing normal clothes instead of a bloodstained, wet, oversized t-shirt, she'd seem a little bit more normal. Maybe.

Did fashion contribute to the Creep-O-Meter when the subject is maybe twelve and very clearly homeless? But then Ross felt bad for thinking that because they had literally just found her alone in the woods during a thunderstorm.

After a minute, when the shuffling had ceased, Ross peered over her shoulder and saw that the girl was finished changing and was now staring into the mirror.

"Er, all done?" Ross asked, turning around to face the girl completely. The girl stared for a few moments, making Ross Ultra-Uncomfortable, before she nodded. "Awesome. I'm, uh, Ross, by the way. Short for Roslyn."

She hasn't expected an answer, and was turning towards the door when the girl tried to pronounce her name.

Which involved speaking. Mike had been right.

"Roz...Lynn?" Her voice was soft and quiet, so quiet that Ross barely heard, but it still caught her off guard.

She blinked, her eyes widening to a size that might have been comical to anyone else, but not to the thought-to-be-mute girl in front of her.

"Uh, yeah," Ross nodded. "Roslyn. What's your name?"

Whatever voice the girl had claimed for those three seconds apparently left her. She said nothing, only blinked at Ross like an owl.

"Well, let's just..." She turned around and opened the door and speed-walked away, because man did this girl unsettle her.

Ross stood at the foot of the stairs, watching Mike hand the girl a sleeping bag under the make-shift fort they had made, while Dustin and Lucas were giving the two apprehensive looks from the top of the stairs.

"So you really think she's psycho?" Dustin asked Lucas. Ross looked up to him, waiting to see Lucas's answer.

Lucas shook his head and gave Mike a withering look. "Wouldn't want her in my house." And with those happy words, he continued on up the steps.

Dustin paused though, conteplating something in her head as he watched Mike help the girl get settled. "Mental." He sighed and looked down to Ross, internally wiping the situation from his mind

until he could think about it tomorrow. "Goodnight, Ross."

"Goodnight," she said back, and he quickly followed Lucas up the stairs. Ross glanced towards the fort again, picked up her spare bag of clothes from the floor, and went to change in the bathroom.

After removing herself from the sopping wet outfit that was trying to vacuum seal itself to her skin, she put on a much drier, much more appreciated pair of clothes and then waited a few more minutes in the bathroom to stall on going back out there.

Just as she was contemplating how long was too long to be in the bathroom, there was a knock on the door.

"Ross?"

She opened up the door to see Mike standing in front of it, and looked over his shoulder to see a blanket placed over the entrance of the fort. The girl must have went to bed.

Mike politely asked to come in, and Ross opened the door a bit wider before closing it behind him.

"Her name is Eleven," he said as she turned back to face him. He was standing next to the seat, rubbing one of his arms as he stared at her.

"Eleven?" Ross asked him, unsure of what to even think about that.

"Yeah. She has this tattoo of it on her arm," he said, lifting his own arm up. Then he blinked and smiled a little. "It's kinda cool."

Ross didn't say anything for a moment there, just kind of stared at him before shaking her head and saying, "She makes me nervous."

Mike had the audacity to look confused about that.

"Why?" he asked her. "She's just scared and-"

"She pushed me," Ross said quickly, regretting it nearly immediately. Mike nodded, like it made sense.

"Well, you scared her, and she-"

"I didn't feel her touch me," she said, cutting him off again. This time, he didn't say anything. "It was like an...invisible force or something."

Mike furrowed his eyebrows, and shifted his eyes from her, to the door behind her.

Of course. He was probably thinking she was crazier than the nutcase underneath that fort. It sounded crazy, she shouldn't have even brought it up.

"You don't believe me."

"No, I just-" he paused, looking pained for a second before asking her, "the force? Like, off of Star Wars?"

He thought she was lying. Making up excuses to get her out of the house. Well, jokes on him because if Ross was lying, he wouldn't be able to tell. But joke was also on her because he just asked her if she believed in the telekentic powers of the Jedi.

"Nevermind," Ross said, shaking her head. She made to turn around and open the door, but Mike stepped forward and grabbed her arm.

"It's not that I think you're lying," he said the words, and Ross found them to be truthful. Now she felt silly. Mike had known her for most of her life, he wouldn't think she would lie in a situation so serious. "I just-are you sure you don't just think you didn't feel anything?"

She contemplated this, staring at the wall in front of her before giving him a steady nod. Maybe she had just thought it up. It was dark, and cold, and they were out there on pretty morbid circumstances. Maybe her mind had just made her think that the girl hadn't touched her.

"You're probably right," she said. Then she twisted the knob and pulled the door open, and his hand feel away. "I'm tired."

He nodded, obviously wanting to say more but unwilling to push her further, and offered to get her another blanket. "The spot where she put my jacket is wet now," he said, going over to the corner to grab two more blankets. He handed one to her and laid the thickest one down on the couch cushions, then took a thin blanket that was

already on the back of the couch, and put it over that.

Ross laid down, grabbing the pillow that Mike handed her and pulling the blanket around her tightly. "Thanks," she said, watching as he spared the blanket fort a glance before nodding at her.

"Of course."

"Goodnight, Mike."

"Goodnight, Ross."

Mike went up the stairs and flicked the light off, casting Ross into the dark that, along with the steady sound of the thunderstorm outside, lulled her to sleep.

Disclaimer: I do not own the plot, characters, or ideas of Stranger Things

candy95: thank you SOOO much. Not going to lie. You're probably the reason this chapter is so long (it's a good thing). You're encouragement and support has had astronomical effects on my effort in this story, which has been dwindling for who knows why. And yeah, making sure Ross doesn't butt into the story line too much is extremely important to me, I don't want her to disrupt the plot and make it all about her. But any who, thanks for the review! I hope you like this chapter.

A/N: Alright guys, I'll admit, i'm struggling. This chapter is I think the longest one as of yet, but i'm still finding it hard to write. The feeback I've gotten hadn't be very strong (but to those of you who have reviewed or favorites or whatever, I love you) and my motivation has been at an all time low. But I tried. If the writing seems out of whack, it's because I've had a hard time trying to keep steady on the general tone of the story. And my grammar is absolute trash, but I promise you I'm not some stupid kid who doesn't know the difference between their and there, I just don't even think about it when I write because I know what it's supposed to mean. My mind Doesn't think about it till later, when I've already posted the chapter and look

stupid. But anyway, I really hope you like this chapter, and I'm terribly sorry for the wait.

- blockthewriter

5. Chapter 5

Ross looked up at the *pop!* of the toaster, and watched as Mike pulled out three eggos and shoved one into his jacket pocket. She raised an eyebrow at him in amusement when he caught her eyes, and he gave her a sheepish shrug as he dropped the other two onto his plate for himself.

He took his seat besides her, skipped straight over the syrup, and just began to inhale his waffles like it was the last thing he would ever eat. Ross thought it was funny until she realize he was just in such a hurry to go see Eleven in the basement. He was *that* eager to talk to her? Yeah, maybe Ross was curious to find out more about her and where she came from, but more than anything she just wanted to drag the girl to the police and demand they trade her for Will.

She wasn't the only one who noticed Mike's rush to get done, considering the look that Nancy and his mom were giving him. Holly was oblivious, considering her age, and so was Mr Wheeler, although they could probably pin that to the fact that he only ever noticed it when someone cussed. Ross always figured he was like a metal detector except for curse words, and whenever he heard one he said "Language!" instead of beeping.

"Slow down, Mike," Nancy said, giving him a repulsed look that clearly showed she didn't think his eating habits were the only nasty things about him. "That's disgusting."

Mike turned to her slowly and gave her a deadpan expression, shoving whatever he hadn't swallowed of his waffle into the side of his cheek. "Do a lot of studying last night?" he asked coldly.

Ross remembered last night and the boy on the roof, and tried hard not to crack a smile.

"Yeah, actually," Nancy said matter-of-factly. Clearly, Steve hadn't told her that he was seen. "I did."

"What was your test on again?" Mike asked. "Human anatomy?"

Ross would admit that Mike's comment made her want to laugh, but it had absolutely nothing on the withering look Nancy gave him. She couldn't help it, she snorted straight into her orange juice. Luckily for her, Nancy kicked him underneath the table, and the sound of him kicking back covered up her coughing for the most part.

"Hey," Mrs Wheeler asked them, furrowing her eyebrows. "What's going on?"

Mike and Nancy look and reply at the same time. "Nothing."

Mrs Wheeler didn't believe them, of the look on her face said anything at all, but let it go and turned to Ross.

"Ross, honey, do you know if your dad will be back today?" she asked. "It would be no trouble having you stay here again."

"His note said he would be back this morning," Ross said, shaking her head. "Thank you, though."

If she wants being honest, she nearly forgot her dad was out of town.

"Alright," Mrs Wheeler nodded. "But I want you to come here after school. I can drive you out to your house or your dad can come pick you up. We just don't want you biking or walking out there in your own."

Ross was about to agree and say she understood, but Mike got to it before she did, talking around his waffle.

"She doesn't have to go home right away, right?" he asked. "She can still hang out?"

"That's entirely up to her dad."

"I don't think he'll mind," Ross said. He never did. She put her silverware down onto her plate and pushed her chair out. "I'm going to go downstairs and get my stuff ready for school."

"Of course. Would you mind dropping your dishes off in the sink?"

.

As Ross descended into the basement, she heard the static that she'd woken up to. The girl, Eleven, must had gotten up sometime before Ross, found Mike's supercomm, and retreated back into the fort. She woke Ross up with all the static, and even as Ross milled around getting ready, she didn't once come out from beneath the blankets. Ross, frankly, was okay with that. She wasn't actively trying to get Eleven out of there, and would almost prefer it if she stayed in it.

But she knew that her wishes wouldn't come true as she started to shove her dirty clothes into a bag and Mike came down the steps. He paused for a moment, burrowing his eyebrows at the static and giving Ross a lopsided look before continuing to her fort and kneeling in front of it.

He lifted the makeshift curtain and spoke, his voice coming out in a lighter and more gentle turn than Ross ever remembered him using. "Hey, you found my supercomm," he noted, smiling at the sight of Eleven crosslegged with the walkie talkie in her lap. "Pretty cool, huh?"

From Ross's place, she couldn't really see Eleven at all, so she leaned into her side and craned her neck to catch her expression. It was the same as it had been last night, except scared and more weirdly blank as she stared at the walkie talkie.

"I talk to my friends with it," Mike continued. "Mostly Lucas cause he lives so close. Signal's pretty weak. But Ross has one, too." Again, Eleven didn't particularly react to anything he said, so he pulled the waffle from his pocket instead, and offered it up to her. "Got you breakfast."

Eleven didn't even hesitate before grabbing the waffle and taking a bite. While she didn't even stop to check to see if the waffle had some pocket lint on it, she also didn't scarf it down like Ross thought she would have. Looking at her, you'd have thought she hadn't eaten in forever, especially after finding her alone in the woods. Ross had expected her to eat it as fast, if not faster, than how Mike had eaten his this morning, but apparently she was wrong.

"So listen," Mike started, pointing his fingers upwards, "this is gonna sound a little weird, but I just need you to go out there. Then go to

the front door and find the doorbell. My mom will answer and you'll tell her that you're lost and that you need help. But whatever you do, you can't tell her about last night or that you know me. Understand?"

Apparently, she didn't understand, because she only have him that look and continued to eat her waffle.

"Don't you think your mom will question the fact that she's wearing your clothes?" Ross asked him, raising an eyebrow.

He looked back to her, giving her a small glare that told her that *no, he hadn't thought of it,* but that he also didn't really care. "Really, it's no big deal," he said, turning back to her. "We'll just pretend to meet each other again."

There was another second where no one said anything, so Mike added, "And my mom, she'll know who to call."

Mike knew that he meant the words comfortingly, but Ross didn't think that Eleven took them that way.

"No," she said.

Ross tugged at her hair, reeling over the sound of the girl's voice. Mike reeled over the fact she said no.

"No?" he stammered.

"No."

"No...you don't want my mom to get help?" he asked hesitantly. Eleven shook her head. Mike cast a glance to Ross, and she shuffled over with a sigh.

"You're in trouble, aren't you," he asked hesitantly. They all knew the answer. Eleven didn't even bother to say anything, staring ahead of her before flicking her eyes over to meet theirs. "Who-who are you in trouble with?

"Bad."

Bad, who knew. One would automatically assume that being in

trouble meant something bad, but maybe that was just Ross.

"Bad?" Mike repeated. "Bad people?"

Eleven nodded, and Ross's thoughts immediately went to Will. They could only connect so many dots before they had to assume what happened. It couldn't *just* be a lost-in-the-woods situation, not with Eleven here and the "bad people" out there, where Will disappeared.

But then again, the only people that *knew* about Eleven were four seventh graders. They should have brought her to the police.

"They want to hurt you?" Mike asked with wide eyes. "The bad people?"

Ross resisted to tell him that *yeah, that's what bad people tend to do,* and instead watched as Eleven raised her hand up, posed as a finger gun, to her pen forehead.

Then, she turned it on Mike for a moment, then aimed it towards Ross before lowering her hand and raising her eyebrows slightly.

Well wasn't that *wonderful.*

"Understand?" Eleven asked.

Ross thought she understood. She didn't *want* to understand, but unfortunately she did. And her mind started running at a hundred miles per hour, crashing through thoughts like a freight train and the tracks all lead to one giant sub station will billboard signs that asked **What happened to Will?** in giant neon letters.

She was beginning to just assume what happened. Well, it's not like she wasn't before because this time it was *worse.* Eleven had just bulldozed down the gate holding all of Ross's panicked thoughts. Will was *out there* where the *bad people* were, who all probably had *guns,* and he was probably *scared out of his mind,* and-

"Ross, is Mike down there?" Mrs Wheeler called from upstairs. Her sudden presence made all three of them jump, and Ross scrambled to her feet.

"Yeah, he's helping me get my things," she yelled back up, quickly trying to diminish her thoughts. She had to think positively. She *couldn't* believe that will was gone. Not until there was proof.

"Alright, well you two will need to hurry, or you're going to be late!" Mike's mom said.

"Okay, mom!" Mike yelled towards the stairs, before turning back to Eleven and shaking his hands frantically. He reached up and grabbed the sheet, getting ready to lower it. "Alright, I'll be back. Just stay here, okay?"

Ross watched as he jumped to his feet, snatched her bag from the floor, and began to head towards the stairs.

"By 'I'll be back' you mean after school, right?" she called, racing after him. "Right?!"

.

"Oh, this is weird." Dustin shrugged his backpack off of his shoulders and slid into his desk, setting the bad down behind him. He eyes Mike's and Ross's desks, before flicking his eyes over to Lucas. "He's never this late."

Lucas scoffed and set his bag down, too, glancing around the classroom. "I'm telling you, his stupid plan failed."

Mike's seat, to the right of Lucas, was empty and so was Ross's, who sat behind Dustin.

"I thought you liked his plan," Dustin frowned.

"Yeah, but obviously it was stupid," Lucas defended, "or he'd be here." Dustin's eyes drifted to something off behind Lucas, and he cocked his head.

"Well, Ross is here," he offered, nodding towards the door. Lucas turned in his seat to see the redhead enter the classroom, and the peeved expression on her face did not go unnoticed by either boy. At first Lucas thought that she had a run in with Harrington, he was the only person he had ever seen get Ross riled up.

But then he realized that her entrance was lacking one Mike Wheeler.

Neither of the boys said anything until she sat down, just turning in their seats to face her. Even then they waited a moment, to see if she would speak first, but it was clear she wasn't going to as she just stared at Dustin and Lucas's questioning gazes.

"Uh, where's Mike?" Dustin asked hesitantly.

"At his house."

"His mom knows, doesn't she?" Lucas asked her. "But if she does, then why are you-"

"She doesn't know about the girl," Ross assured him, and she added, "or about him being home."

"He ditched?" Dustin said alarmingly.

"Stopped and block from his house and told me he was going to stay with her," Ross said. Both boys could tell that she was trying to quell her anger. She didn't like to make a huge deal out of things. Harrington was the only exception.

"So he never had her knock on the door?" Lucas asked, he anger getting the better of him, too. Except, he was more annoyed than anything. Mike was going to get himself caught. They should have taken the girl to an adult while they had the chance.

But no, Mike had to stash her in his basement because he didn't want to get in trouble.

"She said no," Ross said, rolling her eyes. Both Lucas and Dustin raised their eyebrows.

"And he accepted that?" Lucas asked.

"Why did she say no?" Dustin questioned next.

Ross answers Lucas first, saying, "Yeah, he told her to just stay in the basement then." She turned her gaze to Dustin and shrugged. "And I don't know. She said something about bad men and held a finger gun

to our heads."

"*Finger guns?"*

"She's crazy," Lucas said, shaking his head. "*Mike's* crazy. I can't believe him."

Ross shook her head, too, running her pencil over the surface of her desk in thick lines. "Neither can I."

"I still can't believe he let her stay the night," Dustin muttered. Then he turned to Ross and asked as an after though, "Did you stay in the basement with her?"

She nodded, and he leaned forward, whispering, "Did she sleep naked?"

"I don't know!" Ross exclaimed, reaching forward to try and smack Dustin's cap off his head. "She stayed in the fort!"

Dustin have them both a wide eyes look, and Lucas groaned.

"Oh, my God, she didn't," he said, shaking his head at Dustin.

"Oh, if Mrs Wheeler tells my parents," he said with a sigh, pushing the conversation in a different direction. He rubbed his hands on his face, perhaps with a bit too much stress that a 7th grader should have.

"No way," Lucas said sternly. "Mike would never rat us out."

"I don't know," Dustin said with uncertainty.

"He wouldn't," Ross added, shaking her head.

"All that matters is, after school the freak will be back in the loony bin, and we can focus on what really matters," Lucas said. "Finding Will."

.

As soon as the bells rang dismissing school, Dustin, Lucas, and Ross

were biking to Mike's house as fast as they could. They'd been swapping theories nonstop throughout the day, and the anticipation was getting to them all. Ross's anger simmered away during the wait and she just kept quiet, while Lucas's annoyance only seemed to grow. Dustin seemed to be the middle man, keeping a close watch on both of his friends and wondering how they would react after speaking to Mike.

Upon reaching his house, the three of them burst through the front door and immediately booked it towards the basement. They found Mrs Wheeler in the kitchen, who greeted them happily and told them they were welcome to stay for dinner if they would like.

If Mrs Wheeler was happy and feeding them, that most likely meant that Mike wasn't currently knee deep in shit.

After agreeing to stay for food, they swept into the basement to find it empty, the went back upstairs to ask Mrs Wheeler where Mike was.

"Oh! Sorry, he's upstairs in his room. I thought you would all know since he's sick," she said. At the confused looks she got, she furrowed her eyebrows. "Did Ross forget to tell you?"

When all eyes went to Ross, she figured that Mike had been caught, but Mrs Wheeler hadn't seen Eleven and Mike had told her he was just sick. "I might have forget to mention that," she said, shrugging towards Lucas and Dustin. "Whoops."

They left the kitchen and dashed up to Mike's room, practically throwing open the door to find Mike and Eleven on his bed. Mike was sitting on the edge, explaining something to her, while she was cross legged with a blanket draped over her lap.

Mike stood up as soon as they entered, and Dustin quietly closed the door behind them.

"Are you out of your mind?" Lucas hissed immediately.

"Just listen to me-"

"You're out of your mind!" Lucas answered for him. He opened his mouth, most likely to rant about how stupid Mike was and blah blah

blah, but Mike spoke before he could continue.

"She knows about Will!"

That got their attention.

"What do you mean she knows about Will?" Dustin asked, glancing over to Eleven, who sat silently on the bed.

Mike pulled a picture from his nightstand and held it up for them all to see. It was a picture of all the boys, including Will, at a science fair.

"She pointed at him," Mike said excitedly, "at his picture. She knew he was missing, I could tell."

"You could tell?" Lucas asked in disbelief.

"Just think about it," Mike told them. "Do you really think it was a coincidence that we found her on Mirkwood, the same place Will disappeared?"

Ross furrowed her eyebrows. She had been under the impression that they all knew it couldn't be a coincidence.

"That is weird," Dustin admitted, looking to Lucas.

"And she said had people were after her," Mike said, pausing for a moment. "I think maybe these bad people are the same ones that took Will. I think she knows what happened to him."

Ross had assume that Eleven's appearance and Will's disappearance were linked, but she hadn't considered the fact that Eleven actually knew what happened to Will.

Did Eleven meet Will in captivity, then managed to escape?

"Then why doesn't she tell us?" Lucas asked.

Mike didn't have an answer. They all turned to look at Eleven, who was still sitting and watching, blinking owlishly at them. Lucas stepped forward towards her, and as she leaned back, Ross realized

that the movement might have come across as vaguely threatening.

"Do you know where Will is?" Lucas demanded loudly. He lunged towards her, snatching her shoulders in his hands and giving them a shake. "Do you know where Will is?"

"Stop it!" Mike said, stepping forward and pulling Lucas off of her. "You're scaring her!"

"She should be scared!" Lucas argued. He turned to Eleven again. "If you know where he is, tell us!"

She stayed silent, just staring at him.

"This is nuts. We have to take her to your mom."

"We can't!"

"Mike, Lucas is right," Ross spoke up. "She could know something that could help us find Will!"

"Eleven said telling any adult would put us in danger," Mike reminded her.

"What kind of danger?" Dustin asked.

"Her name is Eleven?"

"El for short," Mike told Lucas.

"Mike, what kind of danger?" Dustin asked again.

"Danger danger," Mike stressed to him. He waited a moment, and then slowly lifted a finger gun to Dustin's head, like Eleven had done to him. As he turned to point it at Lucas, the boy slapped his hand away.

"No. No. No!" Lucas exclaimed. "We're going back to Plan A. We're telling your mom!"

Mike stepped forward and grabbed Lucas's arm as he moved towards the door, and so Ross reached up to grab Mike's shoulder.

"Mike, we have to tell an adult!" Ross said as he turned to look at her. "We can't handle it ourselves. Will could be in danger, and if we don't tell an adult we're making it worse!"

"El can help us find him!" Mike insisted. "We can't tell anyone. You heard what she said!"

"You just met her," Lucas snapped. "Are you really going to put Will's life in her hands?"

"She can help us!" Mike repeated. "You can't tell my mom!"

"Watch me!" Lucas sneered, yanking himself out of Mike's grip and reaching towards the door. When he opened it, however, the knob pulled itself from his grasp and slammed shut on it's own. They all jumped, and the force of the door made the trinkets on Mike's nightstand shudder.

Lucas tried the door again, but just like before it shut on it's own accord. Except this time, the lock clicked itself into place.

All at once, the four of them spun around to find Eleven standing, glaring hard with blood dripping from her nose.

"No."

Disclaimer: I don't own the ideas, characters, or plot of Stranger Things

candy95: Of course! You're my one consistent reviewer, I owe it to you. And with the whole Eleven and Ross interaction thing, it's going to be rocky at first. Ultimately, Ross is going to take Lucas's side over the whole eleven thing, but that doesn't mean she's gonna be a complete asshole about it. If you haven't noticed (and maybe I'm just not getting it across well enough if you haven't), but Ross is a lot less...*loud* in this story. She's not as outgoing or confident, not yet. I wanted to show that everything that's happening in this season and how it's affecting her, and I hope I'm doing a good job at it. Thanks for reviewing, and I hope you enjoyed this chapter!

A/N: Hiya! Another update! Wow! Alright, broskis, there isn't much to say about this one. Next chapter is where it gets exciting. Or, at least to where it builds up to the exciting part. Anyways, you should all do me a HUGE favor and review! I don't like being the person that's like "aw, review gimme, I'm desperate" but like, I am actually desperate for some feedback, and I want to know what you all think! That being said, I hope you enjoy, and sorry for any mistakes regarding grammar or spelling!

- blockthewriter

6. Chapter 6

Ross found herself in the kitchen, dialing her home phone number.

It rang a few times before her dad picked up on the other end. "*Hello*?"

"Hey, dad. It's Ross."

"*You still down at Mike's?*" he asked her. "*I got a voice message sayin' you were staying there last night.*"

"Yeah," she confirmed. "Cheif Hopper didn't want me going back to the house by myself because..."

She trailed off, twirling the phone cord around her hand.

"Did you hear what happened?" she finally asked.

Her dad sighed on the other end. "*Yeah. I-I did. Tried to call Joyce a few times. Even went to check up on her but she wasn't home.*"

"She was probably, uh-hanging posters," Ross offered. She thought about how those posters were for Will, and she suddenly felt like crying. "Dad. What if they don't-what if no one finds him?"

"*Hey, don't think like that*," he told her. "*They'll find him. I've never like Jim Hopper much, but I trust he'll be able to find Will*."

After a moment he asked, "*Do you want me to come get you?*"

"No, it's fine," Ross sniffed. "Mrs Wheeler's already making food for us. Dustin and Lucas are over, too. Then-then the high school's having a thing to support Will and his family, and I think we're going to that."

"*Alright. Just call me when you're ready to come home, okay?*"

"I think it's going to last pretty late," she lied. "Would it be alright if I stayed one more night? I've still got some clothes." Mike had convinced her to stay another night. He claimed that he didn't think

Eleven would want to be alone in the basement by herself for the night, and also that the other boys were going to come over early in the morning anyway to do some planning.

There was a pause, and for a moment Ross thought he was going to tell her no. And then, "*Yeah, I suppose that's alright. Just, if you want to come home you can call.*"

"Alright. Thank you. Goodbye, Dad."

"*Goodbye."*

She waited until the other end of the line went dead, then hung the phone back on the receiver with a deep breath.

.

True to her word, Mrs Wheeler made dinner for her family, and Mike's three friends, but despite her generosity she noticed that the junior high kids hard hardly touched their plates.

"Is something wrong with the meatloaf?"

There wasn't, unless you counted the fact that Ross didn't really like meatloaf. But she wasn't about to tell Mrs Wheeler that.

"Oh, no. I had two bologna sandwhiches for lunch," he said with a lopsided smile. He paused, then added, "I don't know why."

Dustin didn't have two bologna sandwhiches for lunch. In fact, he barely had half of one because he was so nervous that their parents would find out about Eleven and they would all get on trouble.

"Me, too," Lucas admitted with a small chuckle.

"Me, three," Ross lied. She didn't even like bologna.

"It's delicious, Mommy," Nancy reassured her mom with a warm smile.,

"Thank you, sweetie."

"So," Nancy started, and for some reason Ross wasn't quite surprised that she wanted something. "There's this...special assembly thing tonight. For Will at the school field. Barb's driving."

"Why am I just hearing about this?" Mrs Wheeler asked.

"I thought you knew," Nancy said innocently, and Ross knew she was lying. It begged the question if she was even going to the assembly for Will tonight at all. Ross thought about Steve on the roof last night, and the image of Nancy trying to climb into a window of the Harrington Household almost made her laugh.

"I told you," Mrs Wheeler said, "I don't want you out after dark until Will is found-"

"I know, I know," Nancy nodded, "but it'd be super weird if I'm not there. I mean, everyone's going."

Of course Nancy wouldn't be going to actually support Will. She was just following the social crowd. Imagine that.

Mrs Wheeler sighed, conceding. "Just...be back by 10:00." Then, as an after thought," Why don't you take the boys and Ross, too?

"No!" Mike exclaimed, quickly followed by Dustin and Lucas's protest. Ross watched. If they were going to make such a big deal about it, Mrs Wheeler was going to get suspicious.

"Don't you think you should be there?" Mrs Wheeler asked, confused. "For Will?"

Whether they thought they should be there for Will or not was never voiced, as Mike suddenly choked on his milk, getting it everywhere. Ross quickly followed his gaze, and lo and behold was Eleven, walking down the stairs. She couldn't blame Mike for being caught off gaurd, she would have choked, too.

Eleven apparently didn't understand the concept of stay here, and didn't seem too concerned to be seen by the adults she didn't want to know about her. She was walking in the open where literally anyone could see her. Ross knew she was missing a few screws in that head of hers, but she couldn't be that oblivious to things, could she?

As everyone began to turn their heads to follow Mike's gaze, Dustin slammed his hands on the table, making everyone at the table jump and turn their attention back to him.

"Sorry," he apologized. "Spasm."

In the awkward silence that followed, in which Eleven had finally found her way into the basement, Holly began to whimper and slump down in her chair, as if she was trying to get herself out of Dustin's line of sight.

"It's okay, Holly," Mrs Wheeler said. "It was just a loud noise."

Across the table, Nancy glared at Dustin and mouthed the word 'nice' to him, to which Dustin sunk in his chair, too, much like Holly.

.

"El?"

Dustin, Lucas, and Ross were following Mike down into the basement after they'd finished eating dinner. Mike carried a tray of food, which consisted of their leftovers, with him for Eleven.

She was in the fort again, sitting inside like it was her makeshift house. Mike's super comm was in her hands, and she flipped through the channel listening to static. Ross wondered if she'd ever listened to music before. The static was grating on Ross's ears, but Eleven didn't seem to mind it at all.

"No adults," Mike told her. "Just us and some meatloaf."

Eleven peered over Mike's shoulder to the other three kids, and Ross shifted under her gaze. It was owlish and slightly disturbing, making her feel like Eleven more things about her that she didn't even know. If this girl has telekinesis, who's to say she doesn't have telepathy? What if she was reading their minds right then and there?

That means she hears you talking about her. Think of something else!

Ross turned her thoughts to mashed potatoes and snakes just in case, as Mike assured Eleven that none of them were going to tell any

adults.

"They won't tell anyone. They promise. Right?" Mike looked back at them with his eyebrows raised expectantly. It sounded like they were going to completely skip over the fact that she almost exposed herself during dinner.

"We never would've upset you if we knew you had superpowers," Dustin explained to her, but apparently that wasn't the right thing to say because Mike hit him. "Ow!"

"What Dustin is trying to say, is that they were just scared earlier," Mike told Eleven. "That's all."

"We just wanted to find our friend," Lucas added.

"Friend?" Eleven asked.

"Yeah, friend," Lucas repeated with confusion. "Will?"

"What is 'friend'?"

"Is she serious?" Lucas asked, looking over to Dustin and Ross. Dustin only shrugged, at as much of a loss as him, while Ross turned back to Eleven with an unimpressed expression. "Um, a friend-"

"Is someone that you'd do anything for," Mike interrupted Lucas excitedly.

"You lend them cools stuff, like comic books and trading cards," Dustin said, then looked at Ross and nudged her.

"You hang out with them whenever you can," she offered, shrugging at the curly haired boy.

"And they never break a promise," Mike said.

"Especially when there's spit," Lucas finished.

"Spit?"

"A spit swear means," he paused to spit in his hand and turn to

Dustin, "You never break your word." Without really asking, he shoved his hand into Dustin's, who didn't seem to enthused about it. "It's a bond."

Dustin stared at his hand like it had personally offended him, before turned and trying to wipe the spit off on Ross's arm. She pulled her arm back and gave him a quick punch in the shoulder, because if *he* didn't want slathered in Lucas's spit, why would *she?*

"And that's super important," Mike said. "Because friends...they tell each other things. Things that parents don't know."

Eleven looked like she understood, if a bit skeptical, and nodded after he stopped speaking. Then, she simply leaned back and turned her attention to the food at her feet.

.

They were all hovering around a table now, explaining to Eleven the workings of one of Mike's board games when she abruptly just turned around and walked off. Dustin trailed off from what he was saying, and they all turned to watch as she headed towards their D&D table and just sat down.

They moved to follow her, and as they did, Lucas asked, "What's the weirdo doing?"

The weirdo was laying her hands down on the table and look at the small figurines that sat on the D&D board. They circled around her and the table as she closed her eyes, and Ross was weirdly reminded of a seance and summoning dead people. But then she remembered what Eleven could do and figured that maybe speaking to dead people wasn't too far off.

"El?" Mike asked. She jerked her head up the tiniest bit, maybe in a way to acknowledge him but Ross wasn't sure, and then opened her eyes. Reaching forward, she pulled one of the figurines off of the table. It was Will's player.

"Will," Eleven whispered.

"Superpowers," Dustin muttered, and Lucas rolled his eyes so hard,

Ross was surprised they didn't get stuck in the back of his head.

"Did you see him?" Mike asked, sitting down, next to Eleven. "On Mirkwood? Do you know where he is?"

Eleven glanced at him, and swept the table clean of all the other figurines. They clattered to the floor at Ross's feet. Then, Eleven grabbed the board and flipped it over, so the black underside was facing upwards. Grabbing Will's player, she set in dead center on the black surface in a way that Ross found vaguely threatening.

Eleven was beginning to really freak her out. Did anything she was doing actually mean something or was she just being weird? Why'd she turn to board upside down? If she really knew where Will was, that meant that her reasons for turning the board was because of his location. But what kind of location was black and dark?

And then Ross was reminded of a seance again and her heart dropped.

"I don't understand," Mike said.

"Is he...dead?" Ross asked. Both Dustin and Lucas looked at her, but she kept her eyes on the board. She was waiting for Eleven to say that yes, Will was gone. The blackness was death and he was alone there.

But instead, she said, "Hiding."

"Will is hiding?" Mike asked. "From the bad men?"

Eleven shook her head.

"Then from who?"

She grabbed the last figure on the table from the corner, and placed it in front of Will in a way that was *definitely* threatening.

The Demogorgon.

Mike leaned back in his chair, looking up to the others as Dustin sighed deeply with his hands on his head.

Ross wasn't sure what the hell Eleven was trying to tell them about Will, but she could definitely figure out that whatever Will was going through was bad. *Extremely* bad.

.

The next morning, the events of last night still stuck in the back of all of their heads, Dustin and Lucas had come over before school and were leaned over a table with Mike and Ross. Eleven was sat on the couch, playing with the super comm.

"We just tell our parents we have AV Club after school," Mike explained. "That'll give us at least a few hours for Operation Mirkwood."

"You serious think that the weirdo knows where Will is?" Lucas asked.

"Just trust me on this, okay?" Mike said, and Ross was a teensy but surprised his didn't defend Eleven's honor. *She's not a weirdo, Lucas, so shut up!* In fact, Mike hadn't corrected Lucas for it once, and the Sinclair boy hadn't called her anything else but weirdo since he'd gotten there.

"Okay," Lucas said.

"Did you get the supplies?"

"Yeah." Lucas picked his bag from the ground and started pulling things out, listing them as he went. "Binoculars, from Nam. Army knife, also from Nam. Hammer, camouflage, bandanna, and the wrist rocket."

"You're gonna take out the Demogorgon with a *slingshot?"* Dustin asked, sounding more than unimpressed.

"I was more concerned over his Grandma giving him a knife," Ross admitted. "That thing's huge."

"First of all," Lucas started, "it's a wrist rocket. Second of all, the Demogoron's not real. And third of all, you stole your dad's pocket knife once, Ross, so you have no room to talk."

"Keyword: stole," Ross defended. "Your grandma willingly gave you a knife."

"Either way," Dustin said, "whatever Will is hiding from, you're gonna shoot it with your wrist rocket?"

"Shoot it," Lucas said, then he snapped the band on the back of it hard enough that they all flinched. "And blind it."

"Dustin, what did you get?" Mike asked. Dustin, instead of pulling things out like Lucas had, just upended his back onto the table, spilling it's contents everywhere.

"Well, alrighty," Dustin said, beginning to shift through the loads of snacks. "So we've got Nutty Bars, Bazooka, Pez, Smarties, Pringles, Nilla Wafers, apple, bandanna, and trail mix."

"Seriously?" Lucas asked.

"We need energy for our travel," Dustin said. "For stamina. And besides, why do we even need weapons anyway? We have her!" He threw a hand in Eleven's direction and Lucas scoffed.

"She shut one door!"

"With her mind!" Dustin reminded him, throwing his hands up. "Are you kidding me? That's insane! Imagine all the other cool stuff she could do! Like-"

Dustin moved towards a box to toys and pulled out a space ship from Star wars, the Millennium Falcon if Ross remembered correctly.

"I bet she could make this fly!" Dustin said. He moved to stand in front of her, holding it up in front of him. "Hey! Hey."

Eleven stared at him, like *he* was the weirdo, as he nodded to the toy. "Okay, concentrate. Okay?"

He dropped it, and it clattered to the ground. Looking slightly dismayed, but turning it back into enthusiasm, he picked it up again and said, "Okay, one more time."

Once again, it fell straight down. It seemed like Eleven wasn't going to feed into Dustin's bullshit.

"Okay." Dustin picked it up again and held it out, ennunciating slowly. "Use your powers. Okay?"

As they said, the third time is always a charm, but not when whatever you're trying is stupid. The ship hit the floor once more, and Mike swooped in to grab it while Lucas called Dustin an idiot.

"She's not a dog!" Mike snapped at Dustin.

Dustin went to respond, but Mrs Wheeler was yelling down the stairs for them, telling them it was time for school. Ross snatched her bag up off they ground and ran towards the stairs, racing Lucas to the top.

.

The day was passing about as slow as it could for the four kids. They were itching to go back out and look for Will, now with a supposed Human Tracker by their side. They were outside fort recess, searching for rocks that were the right size for Lucas's sling shot.

Ross held two up in front of her face, side by side try and determine which one was bigger. They both looked the exact same size to her. After a moment, she dropped one back into they round and turned to Dustin.

"Would this one work?" she held it out to him, but he didn't even grab it, just shook his head and told her it was too small.

"How about this one?" Mike asked. Dustin deemed this one worthy enough to *actually* look at, and grabbed it from his hand. After a moment, he shook his head.

"Too big for he sling."

Ross sighed loudly, and a bit dramatically, before sitting herself down in the grass. She was bored with looking at rocks. They should just grab a bunch of them and use them in the slingshot regardless of their size. They'd all do the same thing anyways.

"So, do you think Eleven was born with her powers?" Dustin asked them all, bending over to look at another rock. "Like the X-Men? Or do you think she acquired them, like...like the Green Lantern."

"She's not a superhero," Lucas said like he was just casually reminding them. "She's a weirdo."

"Why does that matter?" Mike asked with irritation. Ross had been waiting for him to say something about Lucas calling Eleven a weirdo, he'd been doing it all day. "The X-Men are weirdos."

Yeah, but the difference between the X-Men and Eleven was that the X-Men weren't real.

"If love her so much," Lucas mocked,, "why don't you marry her?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Mike, seriously?" Lucas asked with a chuckle.

"*What?"*

Lucas grinned at Dustin and Ross, giving them a look like *Can you believe this guy?*

"You look at her all like," he paused, stepping forward excitedly and hold out his hands. "Hi, El! El! El! El!" With each word he took another step forward, until pulling Mike into a hug.

"I love you *so* much El!"

Mike pushed Lucas away, and Ross and Dustin laughed as Lucas only dropped to his knees, holding onto his arms tightly.

"Would you marry me?"

"Shut *up,* Lucas!" Mike said. Lucas stood up, opening his mouth to mock some more, but-

"Yeah, shut up, Lucas."

Ross jumped to her feet, glaring at the annoying sneer that belonged

to an even more annoying person.

"What are you losers doing back here?" Harrington asked, passing over all of them with an unimpressed look.

"Probably looking for their missing friend," James, Harrington's only friend, said with a grin.

"Shut the *fuck* up," Ross snapped, clenching her fists.

"That's not funny," Dustin told them. "It's serious. He's in danger."

"I hate to break it to you, Toothless," Troy said, "but he's not in danger. He's *dead.* That's what my dad says-"

"You're dad doesn't know *shit,"* Ross hissed, but he ignored her.

"He said he was probably killed by some other queer." Troy and James gave their most obnoxious laugh, which came quite natural to them. Ross took a threatening step forward.

"If anyone's gonna be killed, it's gonna be-"

Mike seized her arm, and pulled her back.

"Come on," he said, shaking his head. "Just ignore them."

But it was impossible to do that. Troy Harrington stuck out like a sore thumb, with his ugly face and his uglier personality. If anything made Ross mad it was the digusting smell of Harrington's breath while he insulted everyone in sight. She wanted to do nothing more that shove a tube toothpaste so far down his throat that he'd taste mint for a month. Hopefully the toothpaste would eat away his stomach in the mean time. (Ross wasn't sure if swallowing toothpaste could actually do that, she just remembered her parents telling her to never do it.)

Mike moved past her, intending on doing just as he said and ignoring them as he walked by, but Troy stuck his foot out and tripped him. Mike fell and slammed his chin on a rock with enough force that they heard it. Dustin and Lucas rushed to his side, grabbing him by both arms and trying to heave him up.

"What where you're going, Frog-"

Troy let out a laughably girlish scream as Ross launched herself at him, catching him around the middle and sending them both sprawling to the ground. They wrestled on the ground for a moment, before both Lucas and James joined the pile, all four of them yelling and fighting for the upper hand.

After a moment, and just before any of the supervising teachers actually spotted them, Lucas pulled Ross off of Troy, and they landed in a heap on the ground. James dragged Troy to his feet, and the pair waisted no time in bolting away, saying things about crazy girls in their wake.

Ross rolled off of Lucas and onto her knees, and sat up, glaring his eyes.

"Ross, you can't do that!" he said, sounding like a parent scolding his child.

And Ross, acting accordingly, crossed her arms and said, "Can, too! You heard what he said about Will. *And* he tripped Mike. He started it!"

"You'll be lucky if they don't tell a teacher!" Lucas said. "You're already lucky none of them saw!"

"Let them. They'll get in more trouble than me!"

"But it would also get you in trouble with your dad," Dustin intervened, sounding wary like he was ready for Ross to turn on him at any moment.

"If you're trying to make me say I regret it, I don't," she said defiantly. "I'm not sorry. He deserved worse, I didn't even hurt him."

"We know you don't regret it," Lucas said. "But let it go. Just for now. We've got bigger things to worry about than Harrington."

Ross huffed, but accepted the hand that Dustin had outstretched towards her. She would let it go. For now, anyway.

She looked to Mike, who was staring after Troy and James with a hand to his chin, and asked hesitantly, "Are you alright?"

"Yeah," he said, and they all ignored the way his voice cracked.

Dustin leaned over and picked up the rock Mike had hit from the ground. There was a spot of blood on the top of it, but he held it up with a smile. "Hey, how about this one?"

He set a hand on Mike's shoulder and offered him the rock.

"Yeah," Mike agreed, taking it and smiling shakily.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, this is it."

Mike handed the rock off to Lucas, who held it up with a bright smile.

"Oh yeah," he nodded. "Yeah, this is the monster killer!"

They all laughed, and Ross smiled at them all, forgetting about Harrington and her trouble for that split moment.

.

Once school ended, without any teachers approaching Ross or Lucas and speaking to them about how violence was not to be tolerated, the four of them rode back to Mike's to grab Eleven and then head out to Mirkwood.

Instead of leaving their bikes by the roads like last time, they brought them with and wheeled them along next to them. They weren't quite sure where Eleven would take them, and decided that if they happened to come out on the other side of the forest that they wouldn't want to walk all the way back just for their bikes.

There were no paths in the part of the woods they were in so they had to wheel their bikes in the spaces between trees. Dustin, Lucas, and Ross were all in pace with each other, while Mike and Eleven were several yards ahead of them.

"I still can't believe she has powers," Dustin was telling Ross and Lucas.

"I still can't believe we didn't two his mom," Lucas retorted. "Or *any* adult."

"You're still on about that?"

"Oh, come on, man!" Lucas scoffed, wheeling his bike over a rock. "You know that we should have told an adult. I mean, Mike won't let us now, but we should have told someone from the start."

"Okay," Dustin conceded. "So maybe we should have, but-"

"I swear, if you say 'but she has powers', I'm going to lose my *mind,"* Ross mumbled, rolling her eyes.

"Her powers don't make it okay," Lucas said. "You heard what Mike said. If there really *were* bad people chasing her, we've probably just gained their attention, too."

"Yeah, but those bad people could have Will," Dustin reminded them. "It's why we need her to-"

"If the bad people had Will, that's all the more reason to tell an adult," Ross interuppted. "Let the adults handle the bad people and get Will back for us. I think Mike's too caught up in her to realize that we can't handle it ourselves."

Then, after a moment of hesitation, she added, "And I think you're too caught up in her powers to realize it, too."

"Am not!" Dustin instantly defended himself.

"Are too," Ross said just as quickly. "Don't get me wrong, I want to find Will as much as you do. I just think that Chief Hopper would have a bit more success. You can't tell me that you *don't* have the feeling that this is going to crash and burn, can you?"

"Mayeb I do," he admitted. "But I'm just hoping that it won't."

"It doesn't matter now," Lucas decided. "For now, we just follow Mike

on this wild goose chase and hope we stumble across Will in the process."

There was a moment of silence before Dustin spoke up again.

"Are you calling El the goose, or Will?"

Ross snorted, and added, "I think Will would much rather be a duck."

"El is the goose," Lucas laughed. "She's too weird to be anything else."

"Be careful! Mike might hear you and kick your ass!"

"Oh, *shut up!"*

.

Hours later, when the sun had gone down and when Ross was debating on whether or not her dad noticed her absence, Eleven led them straight to Will's front yard. Needless to say, Dustin and Ross felt duped, and Lucas felt pissed.

"No, no, this is where he lives," Mike was saying as the trio approached him and Eleven. Surprisingly enough, he actually seemed *annoyed* at Eleven. "He's *missing* from here. Understand?"

Dustin and Lucas dropped their bikes into the grass, much like Mike had done, while Ross put up her kickstand.

"What are we doing here?" Lucas asked, not bothering to hide his irritation.

"She said he's hiding here," Mike said.

"Um...*no!"*

"I swear," Dustin started, "If we walked *all* the way out here for nothing-"

"That's *exactly* what we did," Lucas hissed. He turned to Mike, gesturing to Eleven with one hand. "I told you she didn't know what the hell she was talking about!

Mike turned to Eleven, crossing his arms. "Why did you bring us here?"

Eleven opened her mouth to answer, but Lucas didn't even let her make a sound.

"Mike, don't waste your time with her."

"What do you want to do then?"

"Call the cops," Lucas said like it was obvious. And it was obvious, to everyone *but* Mike. "Like we should have done yesterday!"

"We're not calling the cops!"

"Hey, guys?" Ross turned to Dustin, who was staring off down the road. She saw the lights before she heard the sirens.

"What other choice do we have?" Lucas was asking.

"Guys!" Dustin yelled, grabbing their attention. Ross kicked up her bikestand as Lucas and Mike followed their gaze.

"Will," Mike whispered at the right of police cars and ambulances speeding down the road.

Ross threw her leg over her bike and yelled, "Go!"

She took off, and after a second Lucas over took her, leading the way as they chased after sirens.

.

The arrived at the scene and found that the shore of the quarry was packed with vehicles. They took cover behind one of the trucks there, partly because they were sure any adult that saw them were cart them back to their parents, and partly because they couldn't let Eleven be seen.

There were men wafting into the quarry and Ross saw Cheif Hopper standing at the edge of the water. She saw him shake his head as they pulled something onto the platform they held. As he turned away

from whatever it was, she glued her eyes to it, recognizing the vest before she even registered what it was.

"It's not Will," Mike told them. "It can't be."

But Lucas knew better. "It's Will," he said, breathlessly. "It's really Will."

"Shit," Ross said. Her eyes stung.

They all turned around, save for Lucas, and Ross took a few steps away from the rest of them, bent over with her hands on her knees. She suddenly felt sick.

Behind her, she heard Eleven said Mike's name, but Mike wasn't having it.

"Mike?" He spit. "Mike, what? You were supposed to help us find him alive!"

Holy shit, he's wasn't alive.

"You said he's as alive!"

He wasn't.

"Why did you lie to us? What's wrong with you? *What's wrong with you?"*

Will. Gone. His body was just over there but he was *gone.*

Ross's stomach jumped and fell onto her knees, fingers digging into the grass.

But he couldn't be gone. Will couldn't be *dead.* Kids didn't just die in Hawkins. That never happened. Kids like Will didn't disappear. Not kids with good grades and good friends, who won science fairs. Kids like Will didn't just *die.*

"Mike," El said again, and Ross could even hear the sorrow in *her* voice, and Eleven didn't even *know* Will.

"What?" Mike asked, his voice biting. She heard footsteps and looked over her shoulder to see Mike storming away.

"Mike, come on," Lucas said, stepping forward. He was crying. "Don't do this, man. Mike!"

Ross turned back forward and took a shuddering breath.

"Mike, where are you going?" Dustin asked, his words shaking. "Mike!"

She choked, and puked straight into the grass. She began to cry, just like Dustin and just like Lucas.

Dustin knelt next to her, his hand on her back, and asked a question he already knew the answer to. "Ross, are you-are you okay?"

She shook her head, heaving once more before sitting up and wiping her mouth with her sleeve, blinking tears from her eyes. "I just want to go home," she said, and it came out whiny and she hated it, but she didn't think on it for too long before she was bent over again, puking into the grass.

.

As soon as Ross got her bearings (or more like when the smell of her puke registered in her senses), the dashed back into the woods and out of sight. Suprisngly enough, no adults had noticed them at the scene, but they weren't going to wait around until one of them did.

Eleven was still with them, and even though none of them talked about it, they made an unspoken agreement to take her back to Mike's house and sneak her into the basement.

The boys insisted on riding with Ross back to her house, with Eleven on the back of Dustin's bike this time around. They parted ways at her drive way, muttering goodbyes with tear stained faces and carefully black expressions that threatened to break.

Ross practically sprinted into the house, dropping her bag onto the floor with a heavy thud. She paused in the foyer, staring ahead of her with clenched fists.

"Ross?"

She looked over to find her dad sitting on the couch in the living room, on the edge of his seat. His face shifted into concern at the sight of her.

Her lip quivered, and she dashed into the living room, leaping onto the couch next to him and burying herself in his side.

"Hey, hey," he said with uncertainty, patting her back. "What's wrong? What happened?"

She pulled her head up enough to look at him and stuttered out, "They-they found him. He's *gone."*

David was at a lot for words. He daughter tucked herself back into side, shaking and squeezing him like he was a balloon he was trying to pop, because her friend was *gone.*

Will Byers was dead.

David wiped at his eyes and gently pulled Ross's arms off of him, telling her in a soft voice that he had to go.

"What?" she asked, digging her palms into her eyes. She twisted hands in her lap, peering up at him with glassy eyes and God did he feel like a terrible father, but he always felt that way and he *had* to go.

He stood up, squeezing Ross's arms like that *might* make it better, and said, "I-I need to go see Joyce. It must be killing her." If Ross's expression could break any further, it would have he said that. "I've got to go."

He turned, partly because he couldn't look at her anymore and partly because he *had to go,* and headed towards the foyer.

"No, *please,"* Ross called after him, standing up from the couch as well. "Please don't leave me, Dad. I don't-I don't wanna be alone."

"I've gotta go, Ross," David tried to reason, grabbing his jacket and shrugging it on. "Will's gone, and Joyce and Jonathan need someone-"

"*I* need someone!" she cried angrily. "You're *my* dad! You're supposed to be here for *me!*"

"Will is dead!" David yelled, so suddenly it caught her off guard. "He's dead and Joyce needs someone! She lost her *son!* Someone needs to be there! It isn't about you! Quit being so selfish!" He felt bad, but whatever Ross was feeling couldn't even *amount* to what Joyce would be feeling. Ross could go without him for one more day. Joyce needed someone.

He stormed out of the house, slamming the door behind him and leaving Ross alone. He would find out upon arriving at the Byers household that Joyce was not home. Instead of returning back to house and facing the guilt that the sight of his kid would undoubtedly bring, he would go to a bar instead and drink his worries away.

Ross, now alone in the house, fell backwards onto the couch and buried her head into her hands, but she did not cry.

She thought of her dad and wondered why she was so surprised that he would go to Joyce rather than stay with her. Her mother left because David had feelings for someone else. And Ross didn't even have to be *told* to know that. She could figure it out on her own in the way that he acted around Joyce, in the way he treated Will, in the way he compared Ross to the Byers boys whenever he was angry at her.

David loved Joyce, and that love extended to her sons, but it did not apparently extend to his own daughter.

How shitty.

"I hate him," Ross whispered into her hands, before throwing her head back and yelling towards the ceiling, "I hate him!"

She jumped up from the couch and shoved the empty glass he had left on the coffee table to the floor. It shattered on the ground well away from her, and she stamped her foot on the ground like an angry child.

"Why couldn't I have gotten a good dad!" She screamed. "One who cares about me! Instead I got some piece of shit who wants to be in my best friend's family more than his own! What did I do to deserve that? What did I *do?"*

She turned around and kicked the couch, but immediately regretted it. She sat down onto the coffee table, holding her foot and aching toes.

"I want my mom," she whined quietly, blinking rapidly as she began to cry again. "I just want my *mom."*

But she couldn't have her mom.

After a few moments, her crying turned into hiccuping, and her hiccuping diminished into tired eyes and a sore throat, and she sat on the coffee table and stared at the couch, her thoughts running a mile a minute.

So Will was gone. Dead. Washed up in the quarry after disappearing one night on the way home. If he hadn't been *alone,* maybe it wouldn't have happened. Whether he really did get lost and happened to fall in, or if some sadistic freak in the forest grabbed him off the road and drowned Will himself, no matter how it happened, maybe it could have *not* happened had Ross been there with him. If only she ignored her dad's wishes and went home with Will that night, maybe it wouldn't have happened.

And even if it happened anyway, at least Will wouldn't have been *alone* and *scared* when it all went down. He could have spent his last moments that he wasn't going out of the world by himself.

Hell, and even if it didn't happen to *him.* Ross would have gladly traded places with Will if it meant he would have lived. Heaven knows that everyone would have been happier. Her *dad* would have been happier.

If only he hadn't been so against her riding home at night. So she didn't have a flashlight, who cared? Definitely not him. If he hadn't enforced that stupid rule, Will would have been alive. If it wasn't for his *measly* attempt at being a father, maybe Will could have come out

on top. It was all her father's fault.

And even if she hadn't been able to convince her father, maybe they could have saved Will sooner, found him *sooner* if they'd taken Eleven in.

If they'd told Mike's mom, or Cheif Hopper, or *some* adult, maybe they would have taken Eleven in and questioned her. Maybe they would have searched the area around Mirkwood more heavily and found Will before he died.

But no. Mike took that away from them. Mike refused to give up some little girl they found in the woods. All because what? He *liked* her? What kind of bullshit was that? And it all went to waste anyway, because there was no way he could like her anymore, not after she gave them false hope about Will being alive.

And if what Eleven said about the "bad men" was true, maybe Will really *was* drowned by some sadist. Maybe those bad men had found Will instead of Eleven and decided that he might as well die, too? And then Eleven had to go and lead them on about it. Tell them Will was *hiding,* then take them on a trip straight to his house. It must have been some big huge *game* to her. And the only thing they won was some weirdo with powers in place of their best friend, Will.

They should have turned her in when they had the chance. Mike shouldn't have been so stupid. Dustin shouldn't have been so naive. Lucas should have just taken charge and told Mrs Wheeler like he wanted to.

No. That wasn't fair. Ross had been stupid, too. Ross had been naive, too. And just like Lucas, Ross didn't give up Eleven like she wanted to. Ross should have been the one to do it. She had broken her promise to Hopper and went out with the boys, it would have only been right of *she* was the one to tell him about Eleven.

But she didn't. She didn't because she was a liar and ungrateful and didn't follow the rules. She should have known better.

But it's not like she was taught better. Her dad was too busy worrying about someone else's family, and her *mom*... If her mom had only

stuck around, raised Ross, taught her *better,* maybe Ross would have done the right thing.

Yes, it was all her mother's fault. Valery King just *had* to run away. She had to be a coward and leave Ross alone. Hell, even if her being around *still* didn't save Will, at least Ross would have had someone to be there for her. But no, she was all alone.

She knew she couldn't *really* blame her mom. She couldn't really blame anyone. But she was sad and she was angry, and blaming it on someone who wasn't there made Ross feel a bit better, even if she still was angry.

But she would rather be angry than sad.

So Ross took her anger up to her room and took it all out on her pillow until it didn't do her any good, so she turned and punched the wall instead. That *also* didn't do any good, it just did hurt, so she flopped backwards onto her bed and stared at the ceiling until her anger subsided into miserary again.

She fell asleep with tear stained cheeks and dreamt of angry friends and neglectful parents, and running through the woods after a boy that was no longer there.

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candy 95: thanks for the review! I really appreciate it! And yes, I wasn't exactly sure if too many people would notice Ross's change (is it change if she was techinically like it in the first place but would grow out of it by the second season?) but if they did I didn't want them to think it was by accident. Anyways, I hope you like this chapter!

A/N: lol, hey kids. Guess who's back with the logest chapter yet? It's kind of a wild ride, I'm going to be honest. I think I should remind you that I have little to no experience in writing unless you count English essays for school, so forgive me if any of Ross's feelings or actions seemed forced. I really could have

skipped over the whole end part, not gone through the whole crying/blame game, but I always thought that the show should have focused a bit more on how that loss effected the kids, even if Will wasn't actually dead. Yeah, they had scene where Mike cries to his mom, but I think they could have showed Lucas and Dustin's reactions as well. If one of my friends died, I would be an absolute *disaster*. I just think they should have showed how the kids stuggled with that a bit more. Anyway, I hope you enjoyed this chapter, sorry for any errors, and see you next time! The next chapter is going to be *something*. I'm not sure what, but definitely *something*.

- blockthewriter

7. Chapter 7

Ross woke up with a start, sitting up straight in her bed. Whatever she'd been dreaming about was lost on her, she just knew it left her heart racing.

Taking a few moments to calm herself down, she clutched her shirt and closed her eyes. That is, until she noticed the silence.

The house she lived in was old, Victorian with hidden passages between halls and secret staircases. But, despite its age, her parents (when they were together) saw fit to equip it with more modern technology. That being said, there was a constant thrum of noise, small enough that it was never noticed while running, but it's absence was felt when it was gone. And now, Ross felt it.

She opened her eyes, trying to remember if she'd turned her light off the night before while her eyes adjusted to the darkness. She realized she was unusually cold, and grabbed her blanket to wrap around her as she placed her feet on the floor.

Almost immediately, though, she withdrew them. She hadn't touched the cold floor like she usual, instead something that was definitely *not* a smooth, hard wood floor. Whatever it was was textured, slimy, and *moving.*

Gross.

She turned herself so she could peek her head over the edge of her bed carefully, waiting for her eyes to adjust to the dark.

There!

Just below her bed, Ross could see something pulsing, just barely. It was long and about as thick as her arm, disappearing beneath her bed. But there wasn't just one. There were tons of the vine-looking things, scattered and twisting along her floor, climbing up her walls and snaking along the ceiling.

"What the fuck," she whispered to herself. Looking now, she noticed a

lot more than the weird vines. Everything was *dirty*.

To be fair, her room was never too clean in the first place, but the way it looked now was on an entire different level of dirty. It almost looked abandoned, like it hadn't been used for years. Her mirror was cracked, one of the legs to her dresser was missing, and there were random holes eaten away straight through her walls. Her door was open, nearly hanging off of it's hinges, and her clothes and belongings were strewn about the room.

What the hell happened?

Had her dad came in last night and completely destroyed the place? Had *she* destroyed the place before falling asleep? But that didn't explain the vines, or the eerie quietness.

Ross took a deep breath, feeling something settle into her stomach.

This was bad. Just when she thought that things couldn't get any worse after the events of the night before, the world had to shove it back into her face and tell her that the other shoe just fucking dropped.

Ross got up from the bed, carefully avoiding the vines along the floor, nearly jumping out of her skin when some particularly big ones jerked in her direction like some dumb snake. She first looked underneath the scattered items on her floor to find her supercomm, which was beneath a sweatshirt, and then dug through her sock drawer for a flashlight she had stashed there.

She gripped the handle tightly. She was anxious to turn it on so she wouldn't be in the dark anymore because (shut up) it was scaring the ever living fuck out of her. But when she flipped the switch, all she heard was a click. The flashlight did not turn on.

She tried it again.

Click.

"*Fuck!*" she yelled, turning and launching the flashlight at a wall. It hit with a bang and clattered to the floor, and Ross froze as the sound seemed to echo before giving way to something else.

Creaking floorboards.

Terrified, Ross dashed back to her bed, throwing herself onto it and pulling her blanket on top of her. She stilled, clutching the supercomm to her chest and holding her breath.

She couldn't really say they were footsteps, because usually she could hear the footfalls of someone walking around. Whatever this was almost sounded like it was *rolling* across the floor. That thought didn't exactly make it better.

She waited for the creaking to cease, before lifting the blanket off of her slowly, eyes trained on the door in case something decided to try and surprise her.

She turned on the supercomm, and much like the flashlight, got no reaction. It didn't crackle nor did voices spill from the speaker.

The day kept getting better and better.

She sat the supercomm onto her bed, and got up again, tiptoeing over the vines towards the door.

Poking her head into the hall, she looked up and down it, but saw no sign of anything being there with her. Had it really just been the house shifting?

The vines were in the hallway, too, stretching along the walls and disappearing into open doorways. She stepped into the hallway cautiously, careful to try and not make any noise.

It was dark. All of the lights were out, and the window at the end of the hall gave way to a night sky outside. What time was it? Had she woken up in the middle of the night?

Ross made her way towards the window, skipping over the vines and checking each room she passed for some other sign of life. She found none.

The window was cracked, too, but she could still see out of it.

What she saw she could only describe as some sort of wasteland.

Most of the trees were missing their leaves. The ground was, again, covered in those weird looking vines. She couldn't see the moon or even the stars in the sky above, and there was some sort of weird dust-looking particles floating around in the air.

She went downstairs, slowly and cautiously, because they looked like they could give in at any moment. A section of the railing was knocked out, and she had to skip over a step that had caved inwards.

The foyer was trashed. There was shattered glass everywhere, and the front door looked so old that Ross wasn't even sure if it would open if she tried it. There were old newspapers scattered around, and what looked to be some sort of kids toys. She spotted her shoes next to the wall. They were dirty, but she slipped them on anyway.

In the living room, the coffee table was split in half. Splintered wood lay about, the couch was missing a leg, and the TV screen was busted out. She tried not to stare too long at the tree that was growing in the middle of the room.

She went to the kitchen, where there were shattered dishes and broken chairs on the ground, and dug through the drawers for the spare flashlights. The first one she tried didn't work, but the second one flicked on almost instantly.

"Thank, God," she whispered, spinning around.

The light allowed her to see the spiderwebs stretched along the walls and corners, the little bugs crawling along side vines, and the scratch marks in their floor boards.

Where the hell was she?

It was her house, but at the same time it *wasn't*.

Just as Ross was about to move back towards the foyer and try to pry open the front door, she heard a loud BANG!

She jumped so hard she dropped the flashlight, and bent down to pick it up in a hurry.

It was the basement door. She stared at it, certain that it had been

open only moments before, and trying to calm her rapidly beating heart.

"Hello?" she said, waiting to see if anyone called back to the echo of her voice. There was nothing.

Ross liked to think she was rational. Whenever she and her friends watched horror movies (of course behind their parents' backs) she liked the think of what *she* would do in a situation like that.

The answers had always been the same.

Don't go searching for the killer.

If you hear something, run.

Grab something useful as a weapon, like a knife or a bat.

Don't go investigating.

She was about to break some rules.

Walking forward, despite a voice inside of her screaming that she was fucking stupid, she edged towards the door, keeping her flashlight up in front of her. The handle was cold, but it didn't squeak as she turned it and pushed the door open.

She went three steps down before crouching low and shining the flashlight around. There was an old bike, and other discarded items, and then towards the back of the room was-

Her flashlight shone onto something so bright, it reflected the light back to Ross. She blinked quickly, holding a hand up to try and shield her eyes from the light, before freezing in her spot.

The brightness was a face. It was big and white, with a blood red mouth and terrifying, electric blue eyes that peered up at her from the edge of a well, of all things.

It gave her a malicious grin, that scared Ross so badly she fell backwards onto the steps, and then in the next second it was gone, disappearing into the well.

She wasn't going to wait for it to come back.

She ran, up the stairs and through the kitchen, knocking shit over in her haste and stomping on the vines that let out some sort of angry squeal as she did, down the hall and into the foyer, and straight to the front door. The door, contrary to what she had thought, flew open so fast it hit the wall and bouced right back, but Ross was already stumbling down the front steps, sprinting straight past the run down car parked in her drive and into the forest.

.

To say Lucas was stressed was an understatement. He wanted nothing more than to crawl back into bed and stare at the wall, but Mike had other plans. He met Dustin at their driveway, and together they ventured into the Wheeler household. Mrs Wheeler gave them both hugs when she saw them, her lip trembling as she told them Mike was down stairs in the basement.

They trotted down the steps, restless and wondering about just what Mike wanted. It was about Will, and Lucas wasn't quite sure what to think about it.

After sneaking Eleven into Mike's house last night, he'd gone home and cried. A lot. He guessed that they all had. But then Mike had to wake up and decide it wasn't over. Lucas knew what he was feeling. Mike was in denial. Or maybe it was the bargaining stage of grief now, who knew.

But Lucas, as much as he wanted to rip Mike a knew one for reopening the wound that really hadn't even closed, decided against it. Mike was hurting, too. This was his way of coping.

"Great, you're here," Mike said as soon as he caught sight of them. Lucas ignored the thought that told him his friend sure didn't look like he was hurting huddled on the floor with the freak.

Eleven sat in front of him, holding the super comm, and Mike patted the ground on either side of him with two fingers.

"I tried to get a hold of Ross but she never picked up," he said when

they didn't move. "Did you guys try her?"

"No," Lucas said. "I didn't."

"She didn't," Dustin paused, searching for the right words before he said, "handle last night well, she puked after you left."

Mike winced, and Lucas figured it was either at the reminder that he had left them or that Ross had gotten sick. Probably both.

"It hit her hard," Lucas said. "I don't really think she'd be up for doing anything."

"I wish she would've came," Mike said after a moment, dragging his fingers over his carpet. "We'll have to find a way to tell her that Will's alive."

"What?" Dustin asked sharply.

"C'mon, sit down," Mike said again. "El can show you what she showed me. It's Will."

Both boys hesitated. They clearly remembered seeing the body last night. There was no doubt about it, that wasn't something they could dream up. But they also knew that Mike wouldn't pull their strings about something so important. He wouldn't tell them anything if he didn't truly believe it.

Dustin went first, sitting down on Mike's right. Lucas took a deep breath and followed suit.

"What is it?" Lucas asked.

"Just listen."

So he listened. At first it was just static. Stupid, annoying static that just made him wish he was home again. Because at least *there* the only static he would have to listen to would be the good static that lived in his brain and distracted him from everything that was wrong. But *this* static made him want to rip his ears off.

Then, another noise came in. It broke through the chatter of the

super comm, stuttering and hard to make out, but Lucas heard it. It was crying. A few seconds later, they lost the signal and the crying faded out.

"We keep losing signal," Mike explained. "But you heard it, right?"

"Yeah," Lucas nodded, watcing Eleven fiddle with the dial. "I heard a baby."

"What?"

"Mike, you obviously tapped in to a baby monitor," Lucas said. His tone was soft but he really wanted to just yell. "It's probably the Blackburns' next door."

"Uh, did that *sound* like a baby to you?" Mike asked. "That was Will!"

Lucas rolled his eyes. *Obviously* it sounded like a baby to him. He wouldn't have suggested it otherwise. "Mike-"

"Lucas, you don't understand," Mike harped. "He spoke last night. *Words!* He was signing that weird song he loves. Even El heard him!"

"Oh," Lucas sneered, "well, if the weirdo heard him, then I guess-"

"Are you sure you're on the right channel?" Dustin asked meekly, interrupting Lucas.

"I don't think it's about that," Mike said. "I think, somehow, *she's* channeling *him.*"

"Like-like Professor X."

"Yeah," Mike smiled.

Lucas couldn't believe it. They were talking about superheroes. Suggesting that some *girl* was a superhero who was going to help them find Will.

"Are you *actually* believe this crap?" Lucas asked incredulously, looking between the two boys.

"I don't know," Dustin confessed hesitantly. "I mean...I want to. Do you remember when Will fell off his bike and broke his finger? He sounded a lot like that."

"Did you guys *not* see what I saw?" he asked them. "What Ross saw? They pulled Will's body out of the water. He's dead!"

Dustin looked down and picked at the carpet next to his foot. "Well, maybe it's his ghost. Maybe he's haunting us."

"It's not his ghost," Mike said.

"So how do you know that?" Lucas asked.

"I just do!"

"Then what was in that water?"

"I don't know! All I know is Will is alive," Mike exclaimed desperately. "Will is Alive! He's out there somewhere. All we have to do is fine him!"

"Do you *hear* what you're saying?" Lucas hissed. "Do you understand what you're saying? Do you get how much it hurts, Mike? We *saw* him. We saw his body. And to have you just-" He threw his hands in the air and choked a bit on the air. He looked up to the ceiling. He didn't want to cry. He took a deep breath and looked back to Mike and Dustin, who were watching him with worried faces.

"To have you just throw it back in our faces after what we went through," Lucas finished strongly, "hurts. It's hurts, Mike. Don't you get that?"

"I do," Mike said, nodding and looking like he could probably cry, too. "I get it. I know it hurts, it hurts me, too. But I can't let it go. Not if-not if there's a *chance* that he's out there. Just trust me on this, *please."*

Lucas looked down at the ground. He had to reminded himself that Mike wasn't doing this as a game. He wasn't saying all this just to push their buttons or make a joke. He genuinely believed that Will was still out there.

"I trust you," he finally said, looking up. Mike cracked a smile.

The static clicked back on, breaking their thoughts as they all turned to Eleven. She was still messing with the super comm.

"This isn't gonna work," Mike said after a moment. "We need to get El to a stronger radio."

"Mr Clarke's Heathkit ham shack," Dustin said.

"Yeah," Mike agreed.

"The Heathkit's at school," Lucas reminded them. "There's no we we're gonna get weirdo in there without anyone noticing. I mean...look at her."

They all turned to Eleven again, and this time she looked up to meet their gaze. Her expression shifted into apprehension as if she could see the cogs turning in their heads.

.

She hadn't been thinking about how much she had ran until she was completely out of breath and feeling like she was about to have an asthma attack. She hadn't had one of those in years. But, then again, that was probably the farthest and the hardest she had ran in a long time.

And now, looking around her, she realized she was lost.

She stood up straight, now hyperaware of those damned vines at her feet, and looked around.

Trees. Just trees.

She was thankful for her flashlight, but was also tempted to throw it away. Having light was nice, but it also made her feel like the only safe places was where the light hit, which obviously couldn't be everywhere at once.

She felt like she as being watched. Whenever she turned her light in a different direction, invisible eyes would peek back out from the trees

behind her and stare. It was unnerving and scared the crap out of her, but she knew that if she tossed the flashlight she'd regret it.

So she went onwards. She wasn't sure which way was North, because there wasn't anything in the sky to indicate the direction.

The air as eerily still. There was no wind, and those weird dust things floated around aimlessly. At first, after she realized she was breathing them in, she tried her best to cover her mouth, but eventually stopped because the air wasn't difficult to breathe in at the moment.

She walked for what felt like hours, ducking behind trees whenever she heard noises, and sometimes running until she lost her breath again. The sky never changed the whole time she walked.

Did time pass, where ever she was? Was this some alternate dimension to her own where time stood still? Or were there just no more stars in the sky?

She thought about the vines and overall lack of life, and momentarily considered the idea that someone had dropped a nuclear bomb on Hawkins and she somehow ended up being the only survivor.

Aside from whatever was in that well, anyway.

But that couldn't be right, either, because wouldn't she be dead, too? How would she had survived? And even if her grades weren't the best, she still knew the theories of what would happen if someone dropped a nuclear bomb on some an unsuspecting country. There would be a nuclear winter due to the radiation blocking the sun's rays, or something along those lines.

No matter the outcome, though, she was still scared shitless. There seemed to be no end in sight to this damned forest. Her legs were tired, her mind kept turning from the events of yesterday to whatever the hell she was supposed to do now, and she hadn't eaten since lunch at school from the day before.

And worst of all was probably the lingering taste of vomit on her tongue from last night.

She just wanted to brush her teeth. And sleep. Maybe if she laid

down and went back to bed, she'd wake up and realize that it had all been some terrible dream.

But she couldn't do that. The vines on the forest floor still moved towards her if she stayed in one spot for too long, and she wasn't gonna lay down and find out what would happen when they got a hold of her.

So she kept going until *finally,* she hit the edge of the forest.

She found herself, of all places, right behind Will's house. She wasn't sure how she got there, and frankly didn't even want to think about it. How had she wondered the woods for that long only to end up at Will's? His house was only about a 20 minute walk from her own. She had to have been in the forest for *hours.*

Whatever. She would go inside. See if she could find Joyce or Jonathan. They would help her.

If they're home, a voice inside her head whispered. *If they're alive.*

She took a deep breath and started forward. Maybe she could use their phone. She hadn't even thought about calling anyone from her house. Granted, she had other things to worry about, but-

Snap.

Ross whirled around. Her stomach jumped into her throat as she scanned the trees. That *definitely* hadn't been her imagination. A twig had snapped, she heard it. Was it that *thing* in her basement? Had it followed her?

There was another snap, closer this time, and Ross jumped.

And there, in the trees, she saw it. It wasn't what she had seen in her basement. It was different. It was the misshapen outline of something tall, skinny, and *definitely* not human.

For the second time, Ross spun on her heel and bolted.

Disclaimer: I do not own the plot, ideas, or characters of

Stranger Things or IT.

candy95: thanks for the review! It means so so so much! And I completely agree, they should have showed more of how the boys felt. That being said, the only boy I'm really going to focus on with that is going to be Lucas. I don't wanna leave Dustin out, but because Lucas already...idk has a more realistic mindset throughout the whole season, I'm going to use that to show how conflicting emotions over it, or at least some of them. Hope you enjoy this chapter!

A/N: ayyyyy kids, long time no see. So here's this. For those of you that happened to not read Perplexed (this story is a prequel to that story) this story does lead into the second season which is a crossover with IT. Hence, the basement scene, this one chapter is also a crossover with IT. That might be confusing, idk. Anyway, Ross is in the upside down. Fun, huh? I wasn't planning on having any scenes with the boys, but I couldn't resist. I added in some of my own dialogue and stuff, because like I said last chapter, I think they should have showed the boys' struggle with Will's death. I've got no idea when I'll have the next chapter out, to which I severely apologize about. I need to get better about these things. Anywho, I'm sorry about any grammatical errors and such, and I hope you can overlook them and enjoy the chapter!

- blockthewriter

8. Chapter 8

Ross ran towards the right side of the Will's house and straight into the woods that surrounded it. Her plan was to keep on running like she had earlier. Away from whatever the hell that thing was, like it was life or death (which she figured it could very well be).

But her foot caught onto a huge tree root as soon as she entered the forest. She face planted into the dirt and weird vines. Her chest heaved and her lungs felt like marshmallows that some kid had accidently caught on fire. She pulled herself up to the base of the huge tree and curled into a ball. Clicked her flashlight off and left herself in the dark. If that thing came after her, hopefully it would pass right by without knowing any better.

She waited for several minutes, holding her breath sparingly in case she breathed too loud and alerted it to her presence. She only moved enough to shake off the pesky vine that kept trying to snake around her ankle. But after hearing nothing except for her own thudding heartbeat, she shifted in her spot and peered around the edge of the tree.

She saw the screen door to the back of the Byers' house swing shut with a bang, and jumped to her feet. That thing had just gone into Will's house, and needless to say, she wasn't going to wait around for it to come back.

She turned around again, clicked on her flashlight, and hauled ass deeper into the trees, desperate to put a decent amount of distance between her and the monster. In her haste, she tripped several times, giving herself scrapes and bruises and leaving herself covered in whatever weird film that the vines were coated with.

She crashed to the ground again, head over heels. She tried to catch herself, dropping her flashlight, but her momentum only sent her tumbling down a small slope. She landed in a heap, wincing at the squeal of the vines as she crushed them. They made that stupid noise every time she fell.

Ross lifted herself into a sitting position with shaky elbows, taking in

a shuddering breath. She rubbed her forehead, trying to get rid of the sticky feeling she had all over her skin. But it was no use. She felt like her skin was glue.

Twisting in her spot, she saw the flashlight a few feet away from her, it's light shining away from her. She turned onto her stomach and reached for it, gripping it with slimy fingers. It's light glinted against something on the ground close to it.

Ross held the light up higher, furrowing her eyebrows as the glint revealed itself to be coming from some kind of liquid. She reached forward and dipped her fingers in it, holding it in front of her face to examine it better.

It was red.

She shined her light to it again, and moved it up farther, until she noticed a matted lump of fur on the ground.

"What the fuck," she whispered, moving closer.

It was a rabbit.

Her heartbeat thudded in her ears.

It's grey fur was soaked with blood, and it's side was ripped open. It looked like something had torn it apart. Like something tried to eat it.

Ross heard a cracking noise, and lifted the flashlight to shine straight in front of her. And that's where she found it.

A tunnel looking hole in the trunk of a huge tree. It was gaping open, big enough to fit a grown man through it. That is, until she saw the bark that was steadily closing around it.

She stood up and stepped over the rabbit, going closer until she was crouched directly in front of it. The light shone straight into it, dissappearing into it's depths. It had to be a tunnel.

But that didn't make sense. The tree could hardly be four feet thick, let alone thick enough to hold a tunnel. She stood to her full height

and rounded the other end of the tree. There was no tunnel on that end. It didn't go out the other side then.

Coming back to a crouch in the middle of the hole, she frowned.

Where did it go to?

Her flashlight flickered.

"Shit," she whispered, smacking it's head against her palm. It continued to flicker, and Ross had to quickly make up her mind.

Stay here and wait for whatever killed the rabbit to find a bigger meal with her? Or go in the tunnel and hope where ever it led was infinitely better than the world she was trapped in now.

Her flashlight was flickering and the tunnel was closing. Soon it wouldn't be big enough to fit her.

She had to choose quickly.

Clenching her fists, Ross set the flashlight down and reached forward to touch the inner wall of the tunnel. It was slimmier than the vines, filled with weird cobwebs and dripping some kind of weird substance. It looked disgusting and scary.

Steadily, Ross crawling into the opening, trying to use her hands to push away the cobwebs that were in front of her. The deeper she got, the closer the walls seemed to her, caving in until she felt like she was being swallowed whole.

But she kept going, gritting her teeth in determination and pushing herself forward. She had already commited, she had to find the end of this tunnel. And besides, even if she tried to turn back, she was sure that the hole in the tree had closed already.

It couldn't have been longer than a few minutes, even though it felt like forever to Ross, when she reached the end. The exit of the tunnel was even smaller than the entrance, and she had to squeeze herself through it.

When she pulled her foot from the tunnel, and rolled into a pile of

leaves at the base of another tree, she stopped on her back and stared upwards.

There were stars in the sky.

Ross laughed, and it didn't echo in the empty space around her. She heard the wind rustling the plants around her, heard the owls 'whoing' to each other, and she heard the thrum of wild life around her.

She was back.

Lifting herself off the ground, she regretted the fact that she had left her flashlight behind. The moonlight coming in through the trees was enough though, and she didn't feel quite as lost in this forest, despite the fact that she still had no idea which way was North.

She chose to go left and walked between the trees, feeling a lot safer with the knowledge that she wasn't the only living thing in the woods. After about fifteen minutes of walking though, reality began to set in.

The feeling of victory at finding a way out went away, and was replaced by panic. Wherever she had been, she had no idea how she got there. What if she went to sleep and woke up there again? What if another tunnel opened and something dragged her back?

Wherever she had been, it was very easy to travel there and back, if you knew what to look for. It was also easy to get there without planning to at all. She had just been sleeping, for Christ's sake! What if it happened to her friends? What if it happened to her dad?

Fuck, what if that's what happened to Will? What if Will had been taken to whatever hell that was? What if he was stuck there? *What if he was alive?*

With this newfound information spinning through her head, spurring more and more questions that she had no answers to, she almost didn't notice when she stepped out of the maze of trees.

She found herself at the side of the Wheeler's house.

She couldn't really believe her luck, but after the day she'd just had she was bound to have enough good luck to last her a lifetime. Hopefully.

Deciding that the couldn't burst through the front door like she normally would (she found sanctuary with the Wheeler's more times than she'd like to admit), she snuck around to the back door that opened up directly to the basement.

She wasn't expecting an audience when she entered, however.

The whole gang was there, including Eleven. She was laying across the couch on her stomach, wearing a pink dress and a blonde wig. The boys were sat around the table, with one of their D&D manuals opened up in front of them. As soon as she opened the door, all heads had turned in her direction.

"Holy shit," Dustin said.

Holy shit was right. For some reason, seeing them all sitting there and alive knocked the breath right out of her. It would have been so easy for it to be one of them in her position. To wake up alone and scared, in a place that looked like home but was far from it. It would have been so easy for one of them to disappear and never come back. For one of them to end up like Will. Will, who could possibly be alive.

Ross stared back at them, and everything came crashing back to her all at once.

.

David King rolled up to the Byers household for the second time in the last twenty-four hours.

When Ross had come in the house last night, with a tear stained face and the news of Will Byers's death, David's thoughts went straight to Joyce.

He'd left his kid to deal with it on her own to console a grieving mother. The drive from his house to her's was short and he was thankful for it, but when his knocks on the front door met nothing

but an empty home, he was dejected.

He couldn't imagine what she was going through. He wouldn't know what he would do if he lost Ross.

If Joyce Byers was anything, she was strong. She'd been through just as much shit as David himself had, having to deal with a broken marriage and the kids that were left in the middle. He only had to raise Ross, but Joyce had had to raise both Jonathan *and* Will.

They'd both turned out to be amazing kids. Joyce was an amazing parent.

David...well, he couldn't say the same for himself. Ross might as well not have any parents at all. Valery was well out of their lives, and while David admittedly liked it that way and figured it was what was best for Ross, he also knew that he should have been making up for the lack of parental figures in her life.

Without a mom, David should have been there for Ross in ways that Valery couldn't. Like, for instance, consoling her when she experiences the loss of a close friend. But Joyce Byers was a flame and he was a moth, and he couldn't help but leaving to check up on her and Jonathan, to see how they were doing.

So when he went to her house and found nobody home, he figured that the two remains Byers were off dealing with the technicalities of the situation. Someone had to identify the body, after all. And as he stood there on her porch, wondering what he would do now that she wasn't around to be comforted, he began to feel very stupid. And guilty.

He'd left Ross all alone. He left her crying and angry, and he probably even made her feel guilty after calling her selfish. At the time he had meant it. But now...now he realize how stupid it was. He realized how selfish *he* was for neglecting his daughter even if he thought he was being selfless.

But he couldn't go back. The shame of facing his daughter, who was probably well on her way to hating him if she didn't already, was too much to bare. So he ran away from it, and it chased him to a local

bar, where he drank his worries away.

They kicked him out after he fell asleep in a booth, so he fell asleep in his car instead. He woke up well past noon and returned home, figuring it would be empty with Ross off to school.

He got to his house, the big Victorian one that Valery had begged for, and cleaned up the shattered glass that dusted the living room floor. Ross must have broken it. He didn't blame her.

He wasted the rest of his day around the house, cleaning like he did when he was bored and drinking to fill the rest of the time.

He was thankful when Ross didn't come home after the time came for school to be let it out. She was probably off with her other friends, grieving together, but David figured she'd probably get better comfort there than she ever would with him.

So he drank some more, pondering how he would make it up to Ross like he always did after a fight, and wondering how likely she was to forgive him this time. He was always fucking up.

Then, sometime around seven or eight o'clock, he figured he would go check on Joyce again. He knew he should be waiting at the house to get a call for him to go pick up Ross, or maybe a call telling him she was spending the night at Mike's again, but it had been nearly a day since they found Will's body, and David had to check on Joyce.

So that's where he found himself, getting out of his car and closing the door, getting a good look at the other car parked in the lot. Joyce's car, of course, and Jonathan's was there, too. But there was a third car, one he did not recognize.

He wondered who it could be, up until he knocked on the door and the answer opened it up.

"Lonnie," David said, frowning at the sight of Joyce's ex-husband standing in the doorway.

"David, right?" Lonnie asked, looking him up and down. "You were Valery King's husband, lived just a bit down the road?"

"Right," he said with gritted teeth. "But, Valery's no longer around. She left."

Of course Lonnie wouldn't have known that. He left long before Valery did, after all.

"That's too bad," Lonnie said.

David nodded. "Yeah. Look, I came to talk to Joyce about...Will. Tell her I'm sorry for her-for your guys's loss. She here?"

He looked back into the house for a second before nodding. "Yeah, but she's sleeping. Had a long night at the coroner's and when I came up she was sitting on the couch staring at the wall. She needed some rest."

"Ah," David nodded.

"Yeah. Look, I'll tell her you stopped by," Lonnie said, beginning to close the door. David reached forward and held it open, and Lonnie gave him a weird look.

"What about Jonathan?" David asked. "I can't imagine how he must be feeling. Could I talk to him?"

"Look man," Lonnie said, stepping all the way outside and closing the door behind him. "You got a kid of your own, right? Will's age? I've seen her in his pictures. Why don't you go check on her? I'll take care of my family and you take care of yours."

David couldn't help himself. "Your family? You left them."

Lonnie raised an eyebrow and gave a shrug. "I'm here now, aren't I? I regret not being around for Will. I'm not going to let it happen again."

He waited a moment, looking into David's sea green eyes before he nodded towards the man's car. "I think it's time you go."

David reluctantly nodded, taking step back before he nodded towards the house. "You tell Joyce and Jonathan I stopped by? Tell em if they need anything they can give me a call. Me and Ross are willing to help out."

"I will," Lonnie nodded.

David paused for a split second before nodding once more and retreating down the steps and back to his car. He went home and helped himself to some beer.

Ross wasn't home yet. The clock told him it was getting late, and he had yet to receive any kind of call. Or if someone called while he was gone, they didn't leave any messages.

He pulled himself up to the phone and dialed the number to the Wheeler's household, figuring that if she was anywhere it would be there.

Mrs Wheeler picked up on the second ring. "*Hello?*"

"Hey, Karen, it's David," he said.

"*Hi, David. Everything alright?*"

"Yeah, I was just calling to check if Ross was at your house? I figured after what happened yesterday she'd want to be with her friends."

"*I'm not quite sure, I haven't seen any of the kids today. They tend to slip past without me noticing. Give me one second.*"

David waited patiently, and after a few seconds Mrs Wheeler was talking again.

"*Yes, she's here. She's downstairs taking a shower. Mike asked if she could spend the night,"* she said through the phone. "*It's alright with me, if you're okay with it. I think Mike's a bit...lost without Will. I think Ross will help."*

"Of course," David said, nodding. "I get it, I'm glad they can find comfort with each other. Do I need to bring Ross some clothes?"

"*It's fine. We've got a stash of her clothes in the basement from all the times she's forgotten things here.*"

"Awesome," he said. "Thank you so much, Karen."

"*It's nothing,"* the mother said, a smile in her tone. "*Ross is always welcome here."*

"I'm glad to hear it," he said. "Goodnight. Thanks again."

"*Goodnight.*"

David hung up the phone and sighed. He was glad people like Mrs Wheeler existed. It made him feel slightly less guilty to know that Ross had a place she could go when she couldn't stand the thought of home.

.

When Ross walked through the basement door, covered head to toe in dirt and some kind of weird muck, to say they were all shocked was an understatement.

Seconds later she bursted into tears, and the boys sprung into action. They had Eleven sit up, and sat Ross on the couch next to her. Mike sat on her other side, an arm around her shoulder while Lucas and Dustin kneeled in front of her.

They tried asking her what had happened, if she was okay, where she had been, but she pretty much refused to talk and sobbed into her hands.

They'd only seen Ross cry a handful of times, Mike a bit more often than that. When she was younger and got nosebleeds a lot, she would cry when the blood got everywhere. She cried when she broke her arm after climbing a tree with Lucas (which Dustin had dared them to do) and falling out. She cried a lot after her mom left when she was eight years old.

Since then, though, she never really cried anymore. Not around the others, at least. She'd cry to Mike sometimes about her dad, and she cried to him when Will went missing. And then again, just yesterday when they found out he was dead.

So to see her so inconsolable put them at a loss.

Eleven, despite looking like she had no idea what was going on (even

though she looked like that most of the time) placed a hand on Ross's arm.

After a few more minutes, when Ross had calmed down to the point where it didn't seem like she was going to hyperventilate, Mike asked her if she wanted to shower.

Wordlessly, she nodded.

Dustin helped her off the couch while Mike went to the corner to grab the bag that held the spare clothes she left there, and after handing it to her she went to the bathroom and closed the door behind her.

No one said anything until they heard the shower start up.

"That was new," Dustin said, glancing back over to Lucas and Mike.

"I wonder what happened to her," Lucas said. "She was covered in almost like, I don't know, slime? It looked disgusting."

Mike lifted up his arm and examined the residue on his sleeve from when he touched her. It dirty and sticky, like a thin film of snot that was tinted brown.

"She was a mess," Mike agreed. "I don't know what happened. It must have been bad, though."

"I hope she doesn't take too long," Dustin said. "I want to hear what she says."

"And then we have to tell her what we know about Will," Lucas added. "That he's still out there."

They all nodded. For a moment, no one said anything, until Dustin spoke up with grin.

"Just wait till we tell her about you getting into a fight with Harrington," he said to Mike.

"She'll have a field day," Lucas said. They all laughed and Mike smiled.

"That or she'll be sad she missed the action," he said.

"When she hears about what Eleven did she'll probably want to be her best friend," Dustin added. Eleven gave them a small smile, and they couldn't help but chuckle a bit.

"That *was* pretty cool," Mike nodded.

Lucas opened his mouth, perhaps to agree, but they heard Mrs Wheeler's voice come down from the top of the steps.

"Mike, are you down there?"

"Yeah," he called back up, moving over so she could see him at the bottom of the stairs.

"Is Ross here? Her dad wants to know."

Mike took a moment to think if Ross was crying because her and her dad got into another fight, but dismissed at the thought of that weird slime. Their fight didn't explain that.

"Yeah, she is. She's in the shower," he said. Then he made a quick decision and asked, "Could she spend the night? Please?"

"Let me ask David."

She moved out of the door frame, probably back towards the phone, and Mike waited there, turning back to the others.

"Her dad didn't know where she was?" Dustin asked. "Usually she lets him know."

"Usually she's with us," Lucas reminded him. "*We* didn't even know where she was, we thought she was home."

Mike's mom appeared at the top of the steps again, telling him she was allowed to stay. He nodded and walked back over to the boys, sitting himself down next to Dustin.

Not even a second later, they heard the shower shut off from the bathroom.

"What do you think she's gonna say?" Dustin asked them, staring at the floor.

Lucas shrugged helplessly. "Who knows. It could be anything, at this point."

"Maybe," Mike started, trailing off for a few seconds. "Maybe it has to do with Will."

It looked like Dustin was about to say something else, but then the bathroom door opened and Ross stepped out. Her hair was soaked and her eyes were puffy, but she was no longer covered with that weird film.

She returned to the couch and sat next to Eleven, gathering her feet up off of the floor. No one said anything for a moment, until Dustin asked, "What happened to your hand?"

He was looked at her left hand that was sitting in her lap, and she raised it in front of her for the rest of them to see. Her knuckles were bruised lightly, and two of them were split. She shrugged.

"I punched the wall last night," she said, balling her hand into a fist. "I didn't realize they bruised or anything."

"Are you okay?" Lucas asked after a moment.

She nodded. "It barely hurts. It's not a big-"

"No, I meant like, in general," he said. "Are you okay about...everything?"

She thought it over for a moment before shaking her head. "No, I'm not."

Without waiting for any of them to ask, she launched into the story of how she woke up that morning and every detail since. (She left out the part about the basement. It didn't sit right with her to share that moment.) She described how she saw the monster or whatever it was go into Will's house, and refrained from asking when the boys all glanced at another knowingly.

She explained how she got out (with some disgusted gags on Dustin's part), and then about how she luckily found her way back to Mike's. It was after a moment's hesitation she told them, about what she thought about Will.

"I think he's alive," she said slowly, unsure as to how they would react. "I think where ever I was, he was there, too. I think he's been there the whole time. Stuck or hiding from that-that *thing*."

She looked at each of their faces carefully, waiting for one of them to explode on her and get mad for reopening the fresh wound of Will's death that really hadn't even closed.

They all shared a look, and then Mike gave her a nod.

"We agree with you. And we have a lot to tell you."

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candy95: Thanks! It means a lot! And yes, Ross getting into the upside down is a bit tricky. And while most people *are* immediately killed while going into the upside down because the demogorgon takes them there, we have to remember that Nancy went through one of the tunnels that was used to drag a deer into the upside down (which is how Ross gets out in this chapter, hence the rabbit). That doesn't really explain, how Ross gets there, though, but I can tell you that Ross's house is...weird. You read the story I did of season 2, so you know that her house is practically a carbon copy of neibolt except less falling apart at the seams. If all goes well and I eventually get to do the things I want in the future with this story, you'll see what I mean about her house. Thanks for the review again, and I hoped you liked this chapter!

A/N: another chapter! Sorry if this one's a bit short, or not very action packed. I knew I wanted to write how Ross got out of the Upside Down, and I also wanted to include the part with her dad

and such. Kinda convey how he feels about things, and also the scene with Lonnie (i know Lonnie's a huge bag of dicks but I kinda hope they bring his character back somehow in season 3 (and have you seen the new trailer it looks so good!)). Anyway, I hope you like this chapter and are willing to excuse any grammatical or spelling errors!

- blockthewriter

9. Chapter 9

Mike had been right. It *was* a lot.

They just barely managed to get through it all. Ross interuppted every few seconds, asking a multitude of questions and looking confused one second and then like she was having an epiphany the next. Eventually, Lucas told her to shut up or they wouldn't finish it, and she sat in silence until Dustin finally finished the story with them leaving the school and booking it back to the Wheeler house.

Despite all the interrupting she had been doing, it seemed she had lost her voice for a few minutes. She sat at the edge of the couch, head in her hands as she tried to process it all. Just when Mike was considering asking if she was alright, she looked up.

"So you really heard him?" she asked breathlessly. "You heard Will, he's out there?"

The boys nodded.

"Okay," she said, bobbing her head up and down. "Holy shit, okay. That means the body-it was fake."

"What?" Dustin asked.

"The body," she repeated. "His body, Will's. It was fake. Someone's trying to cover it up." This time, the boys sat in silence, until Eleven spoke up quietly.

"Bad men," she whispered, drawing in all eyes. Unlike usual, she didn't shrink at their gaze.

"Bad men?" Lucas asked. "You mean, the bad men that are after you?"

She only nodded, and Lucas huffed.

"Fantastic," he said with disdain. "Not only do we have to worry about getting Will back, but now we also have to be concerned with these bad guys trying to prevent us from getting to him, and coming after Eleven-"

"It's not her fault," Mike cut in immediately.

"I never said-"

"No, but you were implying it!"

"Was not! It's just now we have to deal with all of this shit without adults-"

The two began to argue loudly, and Ross gave a frustrated grown.

"We can't tell any grown ups because-"

"I *know,* we're in too deep! They wouldn't believe us! They would take the freak! I *know,* Mike-"

"She's not a freak! Why are you being so rude-"

"Why are you being so *blind!* This is an *actual* problem! And you're too concerned over your stupid crush-"

"*Hey!"* Ross snapped loudly, cutting Lucas off. Both boys looked to her, a bit caught off guard at her aggravated expression. She pointed towards them with her hand and gave them a threatening look. "You two need to knock this shit off! We just found out Will is alive and all you too manage to do is fucking *argue!* And it's stupid!"

They blinked at her for a moment, before both opening their mouths to defend themselves in some form or another, but was cut off by-

"Boys!"

They all looked towards the stairs, where Mrs Wheeler's voice had broke through their arguments.

"Lucas, your mom called for you," she said loud enough for them to hear. "And it's getting late so Dustin should probably head home, too."

"Alright, they'll be up in a moment!" Mike called up. He looked to Ross, who looked a bit panicked for a split second.

"Oh shit, my dad!" she exclaimed, throwing her hands up. "He-"

"Knows your here and agreed to let you stay the night," Mike interuppted. "Unless you want to go back home. I'm sure my mom-"

"No!" she said loudly. They all raised their eyebrows. "No, I just...I don't want to go back to him. To the house, I mean. Not after..."

She trailed off, and they all exchanged worried looks. Dustin got up and sat next to her, tossing an arm around her shoulder and giving it a squeeze.

"You're okay now," he said when she looked up at him. "You're safe."

"I know," she smiled. Lucas got up, too, and joined his arms around theirs, gesturing for Mike to do the same.

They shared a brief group hug, and then Lucas and Dustin were off, saying they would see them tomorrow and wishing them a good sleep.

Once they were gone up the stairs, Mike sat next to El and Ross on the couch.

"Are you sure you're okay?" he asked Ross, who nodded slowly.

"Yeah. I'm just spooked. Being in that place was..." She shook her head. "I just can't imagine what Will's been through. I wasn't even in there a day and couldn't handle it. He's been in there for *days*."

Mike looked off to the pile of Will's drawings he still had on the table. "We'll find him," he said. "We'll get him back."

"How?" she asked in a small voice.

He glanced from her to Eleven, who was watching them with her huge brown eyes, and then back again. "We have a plan."

Ross perked up.

"Kind of," he corrected himself. "We think El can get to the upside down. Tomorrow we're going to try and find out how, and then get

her there."

Ross's eyes slid over to Eleven and she nodded. "Okay," she said. "Good. Thank you." Eleven just gave her a small smile and nodded.

"But Ross," Mike said. "I need to know, you not wanting to go back to your house. Is it because of what happened, or because of your dad?"

He knew Ross well enough to know when she's had a fight with her father. Lots of the time she would somehow wind up at Mike's house afterwards. And next to the well-hidden fear he could see in her from what happened that day, was the tell-tale sign that her and her dad had argued. It was even more noticeable this time, so he figured it must have been bad.

"Both," she sighed, leaning back against the couch with defeat. She glanced at Eleven, a bit hesitant to say anything more, but then figured that if Eleven even understood what they were talking about she didn't really have anyone else to tell about it.

"I don't want to go back to the house because of what happened," she said, repeating what she had said earlier. "I'm just...scared I'm going to wake back up in that place again. And...me and my dad got into a fight after we got back from the quarry. He...said some things. Wanted to go to Joyce and comfort her, and when I said I wanted him to stay he called me selfish.

"You aren't selfish," Mike said immediately. She nodded quickly, curls bouncing.

"And I know that, but it's just," she sighed, "he kept going on about Joyce and Jonathan, how they needed him. And *I* need him, too, but he chose them. I don't know *why* I'm surprised, but I just-"

She let out a frustrated groan and leaned forward, dropping her head in her hands. Mike placed a hand on her shoulder, leaning forward as well.

"I'm sorry," he said, watching as she pressed her fists to her closed eyes. "I'm sorry that your dad...that he-"

"It's fine," she said with a shaky breath. "It's not your fault. It's not

mine, and it's not Will's or Joyce's or Jonathan's."

"You're a good person, Ross," he said after a moment. She turned her head to look at him and he smiled. "Most people in your situation would probably hate Will. You don't. That says a lot."

"I guess," she shrugged. "I just don't see the point in holding it against him. He didn't ask for it. And plus, he's been through so much of his own shit, with his dad and now all of this." She dipped her head again, and Mike squeezed her shoulder.

"He's going to be okay," he told her. "We'll get him out alive. I promise you."

"Pinky promise?"

"Pinky promise."

.

She couldn't sleep. Mike had left shortly after getting her and Eleven situated for bed. Eleven in her fort and Ross on the couch. But for some reason, she couldn't get comfortable.

Usually, Ross could sleep almost anywhere. If she was uncomfortable, she would find a way to *get* comfortable, and then crash. But not tonight. She couldn't settle down, and when she did all she saw was her ruined bedroom and a world without stars.

Giving a huff, she sat up on the couch and looked around, giving her eyes time to adjust to the dark. She moved off of the couch and onto the carpet, dragging her pillow and blanket down with her.

She laid down again, turning on her side and staring forward beneath the coffee table next to her. After a moment, she heard some shuffling and looked up.

She saw the silhouette of Eleven's head (now wigless) poking out of her fort and looking at her. Then, Eleven crawled out of her fort, tugging a blanket and pillow after her.

She set her pillow down next to Ross's, so their heads were across

from each other, and simply curled up on the ground right there, pulling her blanket up around her small frame. Ross stared for a moment, blinking in the darkness before letting her head fall back onto her pillow.

Eleven's actions proved more comforting than Ross had initially thought, and she finally fell asleep, even if she was a bit restless, after five minutes.

.

Mike went to the basement in the morning to check on Eleven and wake Ross up. When he reached the bottom of the steps, he saw that both girls had migrated onto the floor near the coffee table, sleeping with their pillows next to each other.

He smiled a bit, and stepped over Eleven so he could wake Ross up.

He'd hardly touched her shoulder when she jerked awake, sitting up with a gasp and looking around frantically.

"Whoa!" he exclaimed, loud enough that Eleven began to wake up, throwing his hand up on Ross's shoulder. "Calm down. It's alright, you're in the basement."

She looked at him, and slumped back down to the ground with a sigh of relief. He gave her a concerned look, glancing at Eleven, who had rolled onto her stomach to look at them.

"You okay?" he asked Ross.

"Yeah, I'm fine," she nodded, rubbing her eyes and yawning. She began to sit up again, and Mike turned to El.

"Me and Ross are going to go upstairs and get ready for Will's funeral," he told her. "We'll try to come down again before we leave, and then we'll come and get you when we get back, okay?"

"Okay," Eleven nodded. Mike stared at her for a second, smiling a bit, before realizing that she was staring back.

He blushed, and stood up, grabbing Ross's arms to help haul her to

her feet. "Good. We'll be back later, then."

Upstairs, Mrs Wheeler sent Mike off with his dad to help him dig an outfit out of his closet, while she took Ross to Nancy's room.

"Hey, Nancy, honey?" Mrs Wheeler asked, knocking softly on her daughter's door. Despite the fact there was no answer, she knew Nancy was in there and asked, "Could you help Ross find an old dress of yours? She doesn't have anything to wear."

A moment later, the door opened to reveal Nancy standing in the frame, still in her pajamas. She glanced at her mom before looking to Ross. "Sure," she said with a small smile. She beckoned Ross in, avoiding her mom's eyes as she closed the door behind her.

Nancy had Ross sit on her bed as she rifled through her closet, first pulling out a black dress with long sleeves and setting it aside.

"That one'll be too big," Nancy said as she went back to the closet. "You're as skinny as a bean pole."

Ross screwed up her face, unsure if she should be insulted or flattered and said, "Hey, so are you. You're just a...taller bean pole." Much to her surprise, Nancy laughed and turned around to give her a small smile.

When they were younger, and Nancy still hung out with Mike and his friends sometimes, Ross had really looked up to the oldest Wheeler child. Nancy was smart and pretty, and indulged in their games with them. She'd be lying if she said that she *didn't* follow Nancy around a lot around the time her mom left.

But then Nancy decided she was a grown up and could no longer hang out and play games with them. She would tease them about it sometimes, and even be rude to Mike about things they did which meant she was being rude to the rest of them by extension. So as Nancy got more stuck up, something Ross chalked down to puberty, the two girls stopped hanging out less and less.

It got to the point where Ross was kind of intimidated by Nancy (even though she would never admit it). Add that to everything that

had been going on, she hadn't been expecting Nancy to be very open to her sense of humor.

She blinked when Nancy pulled out a dress that was smaller than the first. It was also black, but it didn't have sleeves and it flared out a bit near the waist.

"This one might work," the older girl mused. "Here, stand up."

Ross did as told and hopped off the bed, and Nancy held the dress up to her.

"This should fit," she nodded. "We might have to pin it in a few places, but it'll work. Here."

She handed the dress to Ross, who took it, and turned back to her closet. She shuffled through it again, and pulled out a dark blue cardigan and giving it to Ross as well.

She paused for a second, looking Ross up and down and ringing her hands together.

"I'm sorry," she said after a moment of the two staring at each other. "About Will. I know how close all of you were and how much he meant to you guys."

Ross looked to the ground, nodding her head, mainly because she wasn't sure what to do when someone offered condolences when they think someone has died, but they really hadn't.

"It's not your fault," Ross decided to say. "But thank you. For the clothes, too."

"Of course," Nancy nodded. There was another bout of silence before she said, "My friend, uh, Barb. She-she went missing, too."

Ross looked up at this.

"The police, they think she ran away," Nancy continued, keeping her eyes on the floor. "But I don't think so. I just...I wanted you to know that I know how it is. What it's like."

Ross nodded. "I hope that they find her," she said genuinely. She hoped that she wasn't in the upside down like Will. She hoped that Barb really did run away. She would be better off.

"Thanks," Nancy said, dropping her hands to her side.

There was a knock on the door again, and it opened to reveal Mrs Wheeler. "Did you find a dress?"

"Yeah," Ross nodded. She moved to go to the door so she could change in the bathroom, while Mrs Wheeler walked further into the room. She turned around when she reached the door frame. "Thank you, Nancy."

.

Ross stood between Dustin and Mike at the funeral, tuning out the pastor's words and staring at the ground. She figured any parent would assume she was just disassociating. It was her best friend's funeral, after all.

But she was really thinking about how twisted it was to be at Will's funeral when he was still alive. How Nancy's friend had also disappeared. How her dad was standing at the back of the crowd somewhere. How soon they were going to be trying to send Eleven to the upside down to find Will.

"Just wait till we tell Will," Dustin whispered, breaking her thoughts, "that Jennifer Haynes was crying at his funeral." They all looked over to the crying blonde, the boys wearing incredulous looks while Ross merely scoffed.

Mrs Wheeler leaned forward and shushed them.

.

Once the service was over, Ross swiftly approached the family, dodging Will's dad (who she'd seen maybe four times in her life) for Miss Byers.

She hugged Joyce tight, presumably catching the woman off guard judging from the way she jumped and tensed, but soon enough the

mother's arms snakes back around her. She pressed a kiss to Ross's head, before pulling away and smiling down at her.

She gave Jonathan a hug, next, which he returned and then ruffled her hair with crooked smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. Which was to be expected, from someone who thought they were attending their brother's *actual* funeral.

After that, she was going to make her way back to the Wheeler's car. Mrs and Mr Wheeler were already on their way, and Mike was a bit behind her, talking to someone else.

However, her dad stepped into her path.

"Hey, Ross," he said, looking down at her with a nervous smile. She recognized the look. It was the one where he knew he was wrong but didn't know quite how to fix it.

"Hi, dad," she sighed.

"Borrow a dress from Nancy?" he asked. "I should have brought in a dress for you. And shoes." He gave her converse a glance.

"It's alright."

"Are you going with the Wheeler's to the meal?" He asked her. He wanted her to go with him.

"Yes," she said. "Then afterwards me and the boys are going to Mike's house."

"Are you going to stay the night there again?"

She shrugged. "Possibly. Look, dad, why don't you go talk to Jonathan and Joyce. I'm sure they'd appreciate it."

She never knew how him going to comfort the Byers went the other day, and she wondered if Lonnie was there when he went. She would have loved to see that conversation.

She stepped around him, seeing Mike who was waiting for her. Silently, he linked their elbows together and led her off to the car.

"How'd that go?" he asked her.

"He feels bad," Ross told him, shrugging. "And I'm going to let him."

.

They went to talk to Mr Clarke at the little gathering afterwards, for reasons Ross didn't know. When she asked, Dustin just said something about him helping them travel dimensions.

"Oh, hey, there," the teacher said as they approached. "How are you kids holding up? You feeling any better from yesterday, Ross?"

Right. She had missed school (and the spectacularity that was Troy Harrington pissing his pants in front of everyone).

"I'm feeling better," she nodded.

Then, Lucas said rather dysfunctionally, "We're in...mourning." Inwardly, Ross face palmed.

"Man," Dustin said loudly, looking at his palm. "These aren't real Nilla Wafers."

Inwardly, Ross hit him.

"We were wondering if you had time to talk?" Mike asked, ignoring Dustin.

"We have some questions," Lucas elaborated.

"A *lot* of questions," Mike finished.

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candy95: Thanks so much for the review! I'm glad you liked last chapter. I'll admit, way back when I first started writing *Perplexed* I considered having Ross get stuck in the Upside Down indefinetly(basically until Joyce and Hopper went and got her

and Will) but decided against it because I did want Ross and Eleven to have some kind of friendship so she had something to mourn during season 2. I hope you like this chapter! (although I don't blame you if you don't. It doesn't have a lot of action literally at all and is a bit of a filler)

A/N: I'm back! First I would just like to apologise for this chapter. It's not very exciting at all and is more of a filler for things. I'm not satisified with it, but i tried multiple times to rewrite it and it just wasn't working. On that note, I'm hoping to have the next chapter out soon. With the next season literally coming out within the next two days I'm getting back into the groove of things. I'm super excited to write Ross in Season 3 and even more excited to Richie again! That being said, I'm going to wait to start writing it until I'm done with this story, which hopefully won't take long. Sorry for any errors and I hope you guys enjoy this chapter and have a good day!

- blockthewriter

10. Chapter 10

"So you know how in *Cosmos*, Carl talks about other dimensions?" Mike was asking. "Like, beyond our world?"

They were sitting at one of the tables with Mr Clarke, trying to figure out how to travel between dimensions without raising any red flags with their teacher. Ross really didn't know what *Cosmos* was or who Carl Sagan was, but she didn't want to interrupt. She just figured it was some science thing she didn't understand.

"Yeah, sure," Mr Clarke said. "Theoretically."

"Right, theoretically," Mike agreed.

"So, *theoretically,"* Lucas said next, "how do we travel there?"

"You guys have been thinking about Hugh Everett's *Many-Worlds Interptetation,* haven't you?" Mr Clarke asked them.

For once, Ross didn't seem to be the only one a bit confused. Dustin's eyebrows shot upwards and Mike and Lucas glanced at each other nervously.

"Well, basically," Mr Clarke started, not waiting for them to answer, "there are parallel universes. Just like our world, but just infinite variations of it. Which means there's a world out there where none of this tragic stuff ever happened."

"Sounds like heaven," Ross quipped.

"Yeah, that's not what we're talking about," Lucas said, shaking his head.

"Oh," their teacher said, at a bit of a loss.

"We were thinking of more of an evil dimension," Dustin explained through a mouth of fake nilla wafers. "Like the Vale of Shadows. You know the Vale of Shadows?"

"An echo of the Material Plane, where necrotic and shadow magic-"

"Yeah, exactly," Mike said, cutting the scientific spiel short. "If that did exist, a place like the Vale of Shadows, how would we travel there?"

"Theoretically," Lucas reminded them.

"Well," Mr Clarke said, pausing for a moment. He picked up the paper plate in front of him and pulled out the one beneath, then took a pen from his jacket out. "Picture...an acrobat..."

He drew two lines across the place and a little stick figure on top of it for them to see.

"Standing on a tightrope," he said. "Now the tightrope is our dimension. And our dimension has rules. You can move forwards, or backwards. But what if, right next to our acrobat, there is a flea?"

He drew a little flea, and Ross wondered if he came up with this little explanation all on his own. A flea? Really?

"Now, the flea can travel back and forth," he explained. "Just like the acrobat. Right?"

They all made various sounds of agreement.

"Here's where things get really interesting," Mr Clark then said, holding up a finger. "The flea can also travel this way...along the side of the rope. He can even go...underneath the rope."

"Upside down," all three boys said at once.

"Exactly," Mr Clarke agreed, unaware of the phrases *true* meaning.

"But we're not the flea, we're the acrobat," Mike pointed out.

"In this metaphor, yes," Mr Clarke said. "We're the acrobat."

"So, we *can't* go upside down?" Lucas asked.

"No."

"Well, is there anyway for the acrobat to get to the Upside Down?"

Dustin asked.

Ross was starting to wonder why Mr Clarke hadn't called them out on their off choice of conversation while at their friend's funeral.

"Well, you'd have to create a massive amount energy," Mr Clarke said, still in his teacher mode. "More than humans are capable of creating, mind you, to open up some kind of tear in time and space, and then..."

He picked up the plate again and folded it in half before stabbing it through with his own. "You create a doorway."

"Like a gate?" Dustin suggested.

"Sure, like a gate. But again, this is all-"

"Theoretical," Lucas nodded.

"But..." Mike started. "But what if this gate already existed?"

"Well, if it did," Mr Clark mused. "I...I think we'd know. It would disrupt gravity, the magnetic field, our environment. Heck, it might even swallow us up whole."

All of the kids shifted in their seats, exchanging glances.

"Science it neat," their teacher said. "But I'm afraid it's not very forgiving."

Yeah. They could tell.

.

Back in the Wheeler's basement, after the funeral was said and done, Mike stabbed a pencil through a paper, making Eleven jump.

"It would take a lot of energy to build a gate like this," Mike was saying, relaying to her what their teacher had explained. "But that's got to be what happened. Otherwise, how'd Will get there, right? Or Ross?"

"Right," Eleven said, even though she didn't sound so sure. Truly, Ross wasn't sure the girl was processing anything they were saying. She didn't think Eleven was dumb, but it was a bit clear that she didn't seem to be on the same level as them mentally.

"What we want to know is, do you know where the gate it?" Lucas asked, getting straight to the point.

Over on the other side of the room, Dustin was holding a compass and spinning around in circles, kind of like a dog chasing it's own tail but a lot more confused.

Eleven shook her head, the wig she had put back on brushing against her cheeks.

"Then how'd you know about the upside down?" Lucas asked with frustration. Eleven looked away from him, towards Dustin.

Ross frowned at the floor. The whole explanation, like most science things, didn't make much sense to her. But one thing that *really* didn't make sense, was why they were talking like there was a singular gate.

Obviously there wasn't. Ross had somehow gotten into the upside down in her own house. So unless Will had went to her house the night he disappeared, that meant they both entered through at different points. Hence, multiple gates. Ross also *exited* through a different gate than how she got it. And that gate had closed once she was out.

Did that mean there were multiple gates, or did the gate just move from place to place?

And she also knew that she didn't make massive amount of energy while sleeping, strong enough to send her to another dimension. She assumed that Will didn't, either. Did that mean they weren't acrobats? Were they fleas? Was Mr Clarke wrong and they were all capable of opening up gates?

Some of this theory had to be wrong. They knew gates existed, but the world wasn't being swallowed whole and gravity was still

effective. Obviously it didn't quite work the way he thought it did.

But thinking about all that just made her head hurt and had her wishing she were smarter, so instead she drew her attention to Dustin, who was still spinning.

"Dustin, what are you doing?" Mike asked. "Dustin?"

The kid continued to spin.

"Dustin!" Mike and Lucas exclaimed at the same time.

Finally, he stopped spinning. But instead of answering Mike's question, he asked for their compasses.

"What?"

"Your compasses," Dustin repeated. "All of your compasses, right now."

A second later the boys were dropping compasses onto the table, and Dustin began to flip them right side up.

"Why do you guys have so many compasses?" Ross asked. "I don't even have one."

"What's exciting about this?" Mike asked, ignoring her.

"Well, they're all facing north, right?" Dustin said.

"Isn't that what they're *supposed* to do?" Ross asked.

"The point *is,"* Dustin told them, "that's not true north."

"What do you mean?" Mike asked.

"I mean exactly what I just said," Dustin explained. "That's not true north."

Ross was seriously surprised and proud of herself when she picked up on what he was saying before the others.

"The magnetic field," she said, looking up to Dustin. Turns out Mr

Clarke's theory did have more than one truth.

Apparently, he was surprised, too. "Are you both seriously *this* dense?" he asked. She wanted to be offended that he took a shot at the fact that she got it before they did, but ignored it in favor of watching him patronize the other two.

"The sun rises in the east and sets in the rest, right?" Dustin asked them slowly, pointing in each direction as he did. "Which means *that's* true north."

"So what you're saying is the compasses are broken," Mike concluded.

"You really think that *all* of your compasses managed to be broken?" Ross asked him. Dustin sighed in irritation.

"Do you even understands how a compass work?" he asked Mike. "Do you see a battery pack on this?"

"No."

"No, you don't," he agreed. "Because it doesn't need one. The needle's naturally drawn to the Earth's magnetic North pole."

"So what's wrong with them?" Lucas asked.

"Remember what Mr Clarke said?" Ross asked him in turn. "Even *I* was listening. I didn't understand much, but I did get it when he said the gate would potentially fuck with gravity and the magnetic pole. And if it's fucking with the magnetic field-"

"It could throw off the compasses," Dustin said. "You can change the direction of the compass with a magnet. If there's the presence of a more powerful magnetic field, the needle deflects to that power."

"Meaning, if we follow the compasses north..." Lucas started.

"They should lead us to the gate," Dustin finished.

.

They finally had a plan. An honest to god, straight-laced plan.

Well...for the most part.

This plan actually had *steps*. Instead of their previous, half-baked ideas that were really just 'wonder around in the woods until we maybe-hopefully find Will' this one actually required them to follow a bit of instruction.

But still not much.

Now, their grand idea was to follow the compasses to the gate. If the gate wasn't open, have Eleven open it...somehow. And after that or if the gate was already open, go into the Upside Down and *then* wonder around in the woods until we maybe-hopefully find Will.

It was a winner.

So they all changed out of their fancy clothes and into something more suited for adventuring, packed their bookbags full of supplies, and then set off from Mike's house due North. Or...the fake north.

"How much further?" Lucas asked, glancing from his compass to Dustin.

Dustin gave a careful sigh and shook his head. "I don't know. These only tell direction, not distance."

"Even I knew that," Ross said, looking over her shoulder to glance at them. She quite liked knowing something that they didn't. It was usually the other way around.

She was in the lead, walking on a train rail with her arms stretched out to maintain her balance. Dustin and Lucas were right behind her, and then a few yards behind them were Mike and Eleven.

Lucas smacked one of her hands down, throwing her off balance and stumbling back to the ground. She grinned and fell into step next to him.

"You really need to learn more about compasses," Dustin agreed.

"I'm just saying," Lucas said. "How do we know when we get to the gate?"

"Uh, I think a portal to another dimensions is gonna be *pretty* obvious," Dustin retorted. Lucas gave a heavy sigh while Ross snickered, and then turned around to look back at Mike and Eleven.

He leaned forward a bit, gesturing for Dustin and Ross to do the same. "Do you think she's acting weird?" he whispered, nodding his head back behind him.

"You're asking if the weirdo is acting weird?" Dustin scoffed, rolling his eyes.

"I mean, weirder than normal," Lucas corrected himself. Ross took a glance back.

Mike and Eleven were walking side by side, shoulders brushing even though there was enough space for them to walk at least a foot apart. He was smiling, his expression especially derpy (he was getting worse at hiding his crush with every passing second); and she was listening to him talk, eyes on the tracks as she wiped at her nose, oddly tense.

"I don't know," Dustin said, shaking his head. "Who cares?"

"She *does* seem a bit jumpy?" Ross said, shrugging a bit.

The moment they stepped foot out off get house, Eleven seemed paranoid. She was always looking over her shoulder and she never left Mike's side.

"Look, she's probably just scared," Dustin passed it off. "We're going to find a gate to another dimension. Honestly, Ross, I'm surprised *you* aren't nervous."

"Who said I wasn't nervous?" Ross snapped. "I'm shitting my pants over here. But we're going to get Will. That's worth going back."

They lapsed into a quick silence, because they all knew she was right. Whatever the place was had scared the daylights out of Ross, and the idea of charging in there head first had them all nervous.

But they were doing it for Will.

.

Eventually, they strayed from the train tracks and found their way out of the forest. They followed their compass all the way to some junk yard before Dustin stopped them.

"Oh, no."

That was never good.

"Oh, no?" Lucas repeated. "What's 'oh, no'?"

Dustin turned around to look at them, holding his compass up. "We're headed back home."

"What?"

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure," Dustin said. He pointed behind them. "Setting sun, right there. We looped right back around."

Ross thumbed the borrowed compass in her hand, furrowing her eyesbrows as Lucas snapped at Dustin.

"And you're just realizing this *now?*"

Dustin stared for a moment, looking offended and confused before gesturing to Mike and Ross. "Why is this all on me?"

"Because you're the compass genius!"

"What does your say?" Dustin asked.

"North," they all said, glancing down to their compasses. Simultaneously, Lucas Mike sighed and looked around, shaking their heads.

"Makes no damn sense," Dustin muttered.

"Maybe the gate moved?" Mike asked.

"I don't think it's the gate," Dustin said. "Even if it moved we would have noticed the change right away. I think something else is screwing with the compasses."

"Maybe it's something here," Mike suggested, looking around.

"In the junk yard?" Ross asked. She side-eyed an old open fridge that looked like whoever had thrown it out had neglected to take out the food first, and it was now rotting in the bottom of it.

"Nah, it has to be like a super magnet," Dustin said, dismissing the idea.

"It's not a magnet," Lucas said. He was pointing towards Eleven, eyes squinted with suspicion. "She's been acting weirder than normal."

Ross just noticed that while the four of them had been huddled together, Eleven was standing several feel away. She looked a lot more nervous than she had before, and was watching Lucas worryingly.

"If she can slam doors with her mind," Lucas started, "she can definitely screw up a compass."

"Why would she do that?" Mike asked, hopping to Eleven's defense.

"Because she's trying to sabotage our mission. Because she's a traitor!" he exclaimed immediately, not even bothering to mask his accusing tone.

Eleven looked like she's was about to cry, and Ross could only guess it was because he was making her more anxious than she already was, or because he was right.

Lucas took large strides up to her, and Mike asked what he was doing, making his way towards both of them.

"You did it, didn't you?" Lucas asked Eleven, getting up in her face. "You don't want us to reach the gate. You don't want us to find Will!"

"Lucas, come on, seriously," Mike protested. "Just leave her alone!"

"Admit it," Lucas pressed, ignoring him in favor of staring her down.

"No," Eleven murmured.

"Admit it!" Lucas shouted. Eleven, Ross, and Dustin all jumped, and Lucas grabbed for Eleven's arm.

From their position, Ross and Dustin couldn't see what was on the sleeve, but they both deflated when Lucas announced it to be fresh blood.

"I knew it."

"Lucas, come on!"

"I saw her wiping her nose on the tracks!" Lucas said to Mike, turning to face him. "She was using her powers!"

"I saw her, too," Ross spoke up, frowning. She hadn't thought anything of it at the time.

"Bull!" Mike called. "That's old blood. Right, El?"

Eleven didn't say anything.

"Right, El?" Mike repeated.

For a second, Eleven didn't do anything, but then she shook her head. "It's not..." she trailed off for a moment, this time *really* looking like she was about to cry. "It's not safe."

"You're kidding me," Ross muttered from her spot next to Dustin. Then, she raised her voice, and turned around to kick the metal barrel that was behind her. "You've gotta be *fucking* kidding me!"

"Ross-" Dustin started, taking a step towards her, but she cut him off.

"No. No! I can't *believe* it!" she exclaimed, gesturing towards Eleven. "I really can't believe this fucking shit! Can *you* believe this shit?"

She charged passed Dustin and stood next to Lucas, jabbing a finger in front of Eleven's face. "You don't think we *knew* that it was dangerous?" she asked Eleven. "You don't think that it crossed our minds that, 'Hey, this could all go extremely wrong very fast'? Fuck you!"

Mike grabbed her bookbag and hauled her back. "Ross, you're gonna sca-"

"No, Mike!" Lucas exclaimed, pulling his arm off of Ross. "What did I tell you? She's been playing us from the beginning!"

"That's not true!" he insisted, stepping toe to toe with Lucas. "She helped us find Will!"

"Find Will?" Lucas asked incredulously. "*Find Will?* Where is he, then? Huh?" He stepped away from Mike and gestured wildly, spinning in a circle.

"I don't see him!" he hissed sarcastically.

"Yeah, you know what I mean," Mike said flattly.

"No, actually, I don't," Lucas sneered back, stepping closer towards him again. "Just think about it, Mike.

"She could've just told us where the Upside Down was right away," he started, pointing towards Eleven. "But she didn't. She just made us run around like headless chickens."

"All right," Dustin said loudly, moving to shove Lucas and Mike apart. "Calm down!"

"No!" Lucas said, smacking his arms away. "She used us, all of us! She helped just enough so she could get what she's wants. Food and a bed. She's like a stray dog!"

"Screw you, Lucas!" Mike shouted.

"No, screw you, Mike!" Lucas yelled back. "You're blind! Blind because you like that a girl's not grossed out by you. But wake up, man! Wake the hell up!"

Ross and Dustin stood by, both looking like they could jump in and try and stop the fight at any moment, but also unsure of how to do it. Sure, they were both mad, too. But not at Mike, and not enough to do anything other than yell. Lucas and Mike looked ready to thrown down, right then and there.

"She knows where Will is," Lucas said. "And now she's letting him die in the Upside Down."

"Shut up!"

"For all we know, it's *her* fault."

"Shut up."

"We're looking for some stupid monster," Lucas said. He leaned forward and pushed Mike with one hand. "But did you ever stop to think that maybe *she's* the monster?"

"I said shut up!"

Mike threw his arm at Lucas, catching him by the back of his neck, and threw him down into the ground.

"Stop!" Eleven cried out.

Ross lunged towards the both of them, knowing that she couldn't let the two of them just go at it.

"Knock it off, you idiots!" Dustin shouted as Ross tugged on Mike's backpack.

"Get off, Mike!" she yelled, stumbling backwards when Lucas managed to roll over so he was on top. She got onto her knees and tried to push Lucas off of Mike, shoving at his shoulder and yanking in his arm. She jumped backwards, though, at the sound of an ear splitting scream.

Lucas was all but torn from her grip, the momentum sending her sprawling across Mike. Lucas was launched across the yard and was slammed into the side of an old car.

"No!" Ross yelled, getting onto her feet and tripping over Mike, who was also racing to get up. Her, Dustin, and Mike rushed towards Lucas side.

He was out cold, slumped against an old, rusty car. He must have hit his head really hard, considering just how fast he flew.

"Lucas! Lucas, are you alright?" Mike asked as he and Dustin dropped on their knees next to him.

"Lucas, come on!" Dustin exclaimed. "Come on, Lucas."

"Why isn't he waking up?"

Ross turned around to face Eleven, who had crossed halfway towards them, looking scared and nervous.

"Why did you do that?" she yelled at her, because who else could have done that. "You hurt him!"

"I-I didn't-" Eleven stuttered, her face twisting up as tears began to stream down her face.

"Didn't *what?*" Ross asked lividly, walking towards her. "Didn't think? Didn't *mean to?* Well it doesn't matter because you *did!*"

Eleven turned her gaze towards the grass, and Ross grabbed her shoulders.

"Look at me!" she yelled. Eleven met her gaze. "You *hurt* him, Eleven! *What's wrong with you?*"

"He's awake!"

Ross let go of Eleven and ran back to Dustin and Mike's side. Lucas was sitting up now, looking around and dazed.

Dustin held up three fingers in front of his face and asked how many he was holding up. Mike reached for is neck. "Let me see your head."

"Get off me!" Lucas slapped their hands away and used the car to get to his feet.

"Just...Lucas," Mike said, reaching towards him again. "Let me see."

He hit his arm and away again and marched between him and Dustin.

"Lucas," Ross said, moving to walk with for a few steps before he

glanced at her and shook his head. She stopped in her tracks just as Mike went to chase after him.

"Let him go," Dustin told him, grabbing his arm.

They all watched as Lucas stalked off, rigid and angry.

Mike sighed and looked to his left, and then straightened up. "Where's El?"

Ross snapped her head over, eyebrows furrowed. "She-she was right there," she said, take a few steps to where Eleven had been moments before. Her back hadn't even been turned for more than a few minutes.

"El!" Mike shouted, turning in a circle.

"Eleven!" Dustin called, walking off towards the directions they came.

A heavy guilt crawled up towards Ross. Lucas had stomped off because he and Mike got into a fight that she and Dustin could have prevented (and because Eleven launched him at a car, that too). And now Eleven had ran away, probably because Ross had yelled in her face and scared her off.

She took a deep breath and then followed Mike and Dustin's lead. As mad as she was at Eleven, she knew it wasn't safe for her to be on her own.

Disclaimer: I don't own the ideas, plot, or character of Stranger Things

candy95: Thanks for the review! And yeah, I'm glad Ross wasn't in there for too long, I didn't want to take away from Will too much. And yes! Honestly, sometimes when I'm writing this I forget that I even made the second season a crossover at all. (which sometimes I think about how weird it is to have a fanfiction that is not only a crossover, but has an oc as the main character. Its kinda funny). I'll probably have to re-read perplexed before I start on the third season (which was pretty

good, if I do say so myself). Thanks for the review and I hope you enjoy!

Guest: Yeah, here soon I'll be starting the third season, as soon as I finish this story. I'm debating on if I should do what I did in the second season and write the whole thing and *then* publish it (which kept updates consistent) or do as I did this season and just publish a chapter as soon as I finish. And I'm *very* excited to write Richie again, especially with Ross and El and everyone else. And yup, my plan is to have Ross with the girls and Richie with Will and the other boys (even though I kinda considered sending at least one if not both with Dustin and Steve for a bit)

Anon: HERE YOU GOOOOOOO!

A/N: howdy folks! Not much to say here except that I loved the third season and that I'm excited to write it with Ross and Richie! Not sure when I'll have it out. It'll definitely be after this one's finished, I can tell you that now. But I'm still debating on writing all of it out and then posting chapters weekly, or publishing a chapter after a finish it. The first option would keep updates consistent, but it would be longer before you get the first chapter, then. Let me know what you think of that and this chapter! I hoped you liked it, and if not, whoops I guess

-blockthewriter

11. Chapter 11

Ross woke up to muffled thuds.

She was sitting up in an instant, eyes wide to check her surroundings. When she saw the light from outside flitting in through one of the windows, she relaxed.

She usually didn't remember her dreams, but she knew that in the past two nights they've all been about the Upside Down. She figured she'd be waking up like that for the next few months, searching for any sign that she was still in the real world.

She looked over to where the thuds were coming from and saw Mike kicking at El's fort. Or, what was left of it. He kicked it feverishly before slowing down, his kicks getting weaker and his shoulders sinking as he did. Eventually, he stopped and stared down at the ruined fort, breathing heavily.

"Mike?"

He jumped and spun around, taking a step away from the ruined fort. "Sorry. I didn't mean to wake you up." He held his hands behind his back and only held eye contact for a second before making sure he was looking anywhere but her.

"You're fine," she muttered. She pulled herself up so she was leaning against the back of the couch and crossed her legs. Gathering the blankets up so he'd have a place to sit, she patted the spot next to her. "Come on."

He made his way over to her and slumped onto the couch, letting a sigh of air out as he did. He let his head roll back and looked up at the ceiling.

Ross didn't say anything. She only put her head back, too, looking for a picture on the ceiling that only he could see.

It was like that for several minutes before Mike finally spoke up.

"I don't know why I did that."

She glanced over at him, he hadn't looked away from the ceiling, before shaking her head. "You're angry. I don't blame you."

He closed his eyes for a brief moment, visibly swallowing. "Yeah, but I'm not-I'm not angry with *her*."

"Then who are you mad at? Lucas?"

"No, of course not."

"Then who?"

He lapsed into silence, mulling it over.

Ross knew he wasn't mad at Eleven, not really. Maybe a bit upset about how she tossed Lucas around a like a ragdoll, Ross was definitely upset over that, but he wasn't *actually* mad at her. Not for leading them astray.

Dustin didn't seem particularly mad at Eleven, either. Just confused as to why she did it and wary because she accidently attacked Lucas, even if it was in Mike's defense.

Ross could admit to being a *little* mad at Eleven. She was mad at her for throwing them off course on purpose, and also for what she did at the junk yard. But more than anything, she was tired of being mad. She had spent the last few days either being scared out of her wits or mad enough to want to yell and cry. She didn't want to be mad at Eleven because she was tired of yelling. She was tired of crying.

"Myself, I think," Mike said after a moment. He sat up straighter and pulled his legs up to sit criss-cross like she was, and turned his gaze down to the table. "I think I'm mad at myself."

"Because?" she prompted.

"Because...because I should have realized," he admitted. "I should have known-I think I *did* know, what El was doing. But I ignored it because I-she was talking to me, and-"

He cut himself off abruptly and dug the heel of his hand into one of his eyes, shaking his head.

"Lucas was right," he said, pulling his hand away and sighing. "I was blind. Eleven *is* paying attention to me, and the only other girl I've really gotten attention from has been you and that's only because we're best friends-"

"And you want you and Eleven to be more," she finished, looking over to him. Mike glanced at her, nodding.

"I do. I like her. I don't know why. And I feel bad, because I've been so focused on *her* rather than finding Will, I haven't been caring enough, and-"

"Slow your roll," she said, holding up a hand. He paused, watching as she turned so she was facing him completely.

She laid a hand on his shoulder, eyes locking on to his own with a weird mixture of calm and determination.

"I'm not going to tell you that you paying more attention to Eleven than finding Will is okay," she clarified off the bat, feeling Mike slump a bit beneath her fingers. "I personally don't see how a crush could distract from something like that, *but-"*

Mike perked up, raising his eyebrows hopefully.

"But, I think that out of all of us, you've been the most determined to find Will," she said. "You initiated our first search. After we found Eleven, you insisted we keep her because we would get in trouble if she was found and because she might be able to help us with finding Will. You convinced the rest of us to *not* do what we thought was best. After we found Will's fake body, you were the one who refused to believe it. Sure, I was in denial for a bit, but you *knew* that he was still out there.

"And even yesterday, you still wanted to find Will," she continued. "Sure, Eleven might have been a bit of a distraction and you could have been more attentive, but you can't look me in they eyes and tell me that you haven't cared enough about Will. We both know that's bullshit."

Mike mulled over her words, before he nodded slowly. "I mean, I

guess you're right-"

"You don't guess, you know," she corrected, shoving the blankets off of her and standing up. "Now quit being mad at yourself and get up. Dustin said he'd be here this morning, right?"

.

"I just-I can't believe she didn't come back," Mike was telling Dustin. The Wheeler boy was pacing in the remains of Eleven's fort, now more stressed than angry.

"She's gotta be close," Dustin said, leaning against one of the pillars. Ross was at their game table, eating a blueberry pancake Mrs. Wheeler had made.

"She said it wasn't safe," Mike recalled. "She just messed up the compasses because she wanted to protect us. She didn't betray us."

To Ross, it sounded like he was trying to defend Eleven in a future conversation with Lucas. Dustin and her had already reassured him that while they might have been upset with her attack and misleading them, they weren't going to hold it against her. Or at least, Dustin had. Ross was still a bit miffed, but she also knew that they had to find Eleven, and soon.

"Mike, calm down," Dustin said with a sigh.

"I shouldn't have let you yell at her," Mike went on, looking to Ross. She frowned in between bites. "I never should've let that happen, it scared her off."

"Mike, this isn't Ross's fault," Dustin said sternly. "And it isn't yours."

"Yeah, it's Lucas's," he said dismissively, continuing to pace. Ross frowned harder, and Dustin sighed.

"It wasn't his fault, either."

"I thought you said you weren't mad at him," Ross spoke up, waving her pancake around in the air.

"I'm not," he said quickly. "I'm not, I just-wait. Did you say it wasn't his fault?" He pointed to Dustin, who shook his head.

"No."

"So you're saying he wasn't way out of line?" Mike asked incredulously.

"Totally," Dustin exclaimed, "but so were you!"

"What?"

Ross sighed. Despite Mike admitting to her that he wasn't mad at Lucas, and that he kind of blamed himself, apparently he wasn't ready to admit that in front of everyone else.

"And so was Ross," Dustin added. She frowned again, but didn't speak up to disagree. Dustin was right. She shouldn't have gotten mad and yelled at Eleven. It probably *was* the reason she had left.

"And so was Eleven," Dustin said, causing Mike to scoff.

"Oh, give me a break!"

"No, Mike!" Dustin exclaimed, stepping forward and away from the pillar. Ross sat up straight watching as their usually cool-tempered friend (when it came to fights within the party) surged towards Mike. "You give *me* a break. All four of you were being a bunch of little assholes! I was the only reasonable one!"

"He's right," Ross found herself saying. Dustin *had* been the only one to not lose his cool.

"See!" he said, gesturing to Ross. "But the bottom line is-you pushed first. And you know the rule. You draw first blood-"

"No!" Mike exclaimed, knowing where he was going with it. "No way! I'm not shaking his hand!"

"You're shaking his hand!" Dustin clarified.

"No, I'm not."

"This isn't a discussion. It's a rule of law. Obey or be banished from the party," he said firmly, raising his eyebrows at Mike. "Do you want to be banished?"

"No," Mike said in defeat, uncrossing his arms.

"Good." Dustin turned around and picked up his jacket, starting to shrug it on as he nodded his head in a gesture for Ross to get up and do the same.

"Where are we going?" Mike asked as she shoved the remainder of her pancake into her mouth.

"Where do you think?" Dustin asked sarcastically, picking up Mike's bag and starting towards him. "We're going to get Lucas. And then, we're gonna find Eleven."

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When Lucas opened the door, he looked less than impressed. He glanced over all three of them blankly, brow furrowed, before looking at Mike and getting straight to the point.

"What do you want?"

This was gonna go south. Ross already knew it.

When Mike said nothing, Dustin smacked his shoulder lightly and sent him a look. Ross tried to remember a time when anyone in the party was this unwilling to end an argument with a hand shake. The number of times any of them had drawn blood (really just got into any sort of physical fight) could be counted on one hand. Those fights, and any other fight that was just short of becoming a boxing match, seemed miniscule compared to this one. But they'd also never been in a situation more serious or more strange.

Mike sighed loudly, as if he was reminding Lucas that he would rather be anywhere but *there* and said," I drew first blood, so..."

He held out his hand for Lucas to shake.

Usually that's as far as it got. The moment the hand was extended

like a white truce flag being waved out on the battlefield, it was over. The fight was done and everything went back to normal.

But Lucas just...stared at it. He looked from Mike, to his hand, and then back, like part of him couldn't quite believe that Mike even had the audacity to ask for forgiveness.

This was definitely going South.

They ended up in Lucas's living room where he could "think it over". Ross suspected that there was no thinking to be done. He knew his answer and just wanted Mike to watch him pace in front of him tauntingly, hanging the fact that he caved first over his head.

Finally, Lucas turned to Mike and Dustin, who stood in front of him, and nodded. "Okay, I'll shake." Despite his words, he crossed his arms.

Ross watched from the rocking chair as Dustin grinned and Mike held out his hand again.

"On one condition." And there it was. "We forget the weirdo and go straight to the gate."

Mike withdrew his hand in an instant, his defenses for Eleven rising up high.

"Then the deal's off!"

"Fine!" Lucas yelled, throwing his hands up.

"Fine!" Mike shouted back, already turning to leave.

Dustin grabbed his shoulder and spun him back around, shaking his head so hard his hat nearly fell off. "No, no, not fine! Guys, seriously?"

Both boys turned away from Dustin stubbornly, and Ross rolled her eyes, slumping into her chair. She was completely over all of the fights. Their bullshit was eating away at her because of course they would put a petty fight in front of actual priorities.

Maybe they'd think differently of they'd went to the Upside Down, too, but they hadn't. The only one who even remotely knew anything about it was Eleven, who was currently missing. They had to find Will, who was all alone there, but they were too distracted over some stupid spat.

She wished they could just both admit they were wrong to each other and get on with it. She already knew Mike knew he was wrong. But she also supposed that for Mike, this was more about defended Eleven than anything else .

"Do you even remember what happened on the Bloodstone Pass?" Dustin asked.

Ross furrowed her eyebrows. As if for that one moment they could put aside their differences, Mike and Lucas glanced at each other in confusion before shrugging.

"We couldn't agree on what path to take, so we split up the party," Dustin reminded them. "And those trolls took us out one by one. And it all went to shut. And we were all disabled! So we stick together, no matter what!"

"Yeah, I agree," Lucas said, stepping forward and gesturing to them all. "But *this* is the party, right here in this room."

"El is one of us now," Mike said.

"Uh, *no*, she's not," Lucas said matter-of-factly. "Not even close! Never will be. She's a liar, a traitor-"

"She was just trying to keep us safe! She didn't mean to hurt you, it was an accident!"

Lucas raised his eyebrows. "An *accident?*" he asked incredulously.

"All right," Dustin cut in to try and simmer them both down," accident or not...admit it, it was a little awesome."

"Seriously?" Ross groaned, digging her hands into her curls.

"Awesome?"

"Yeah, she threw you in the air with her mind!"

"I could have been killed!" Lucas yelled, and Ross was thankful that in was just them in the house. Hearing that would definitely raise some questions.

"Which is exactly why we need her," Mike argued. "She's a weapon! Do you seriously wanna fight the Demogorgon with your wrist rocket? That's like R2-D2 going to fight Darth Vader. We're no use to Will if we're dead."

Lucas took a deep breath, the anger rolling off of him in waves. "If you two wanna waste your time looking for a traitor, go ahead," he told them. "Cause I'm not spending my time on her anymore. No way!"

He glanced over to Ross, before turning back to them and stating with finality, "I'm going to the gate. And I'm going to find Will."

He moved forward and shoved his way in between Mike and Dustin harshly.

Ross knew what his glance meant. It was an invitation. A question.

Was she going with him to find Will.

She knew that Eleven couldn't be out there alone. They had to find her, and fast.

But she also knew that Lucas couldn't be alone either.

Dustin and Mike both turned back to her. Mike looked like he expected her to stand up and follow them out the door, but Dustin had the expression that told her he already knew her decision.

"I'm going with Lucas," she said.

"What?" Mike hissed. "Why? He just said that Eleven-"

"I know what he said," she interjected, standing up. "And honestly, if she had launched me halfway across a junk yard, I would probably be inclined to agree with him."

"You can't possibly think-"

"I can and I will. Listen, Mike," she started. "I know she never intended to hurt Lucas, but the fact still stands that she did. Lucas is angry because *you* seem to refuse to acknowledge that Eleven is at any fault of her own. You told me this morning that you blamed yourself because you knew Lucas as right. You should have told him that."

Mike scoffed. "That wouldn't change anything. He would still want to abandon El."

"Yeah, but that might've convinced him that you aren't abandoning Will," she said. Mike opened his mouth, but didn't say anything. "Me and Dustin know you aren't, we know you want to find Eleven so you *can* find Will. But from Lucas's point of view, it doesn't look like that.

"So I'm going with him to let him know that he's not alone," she declared. "Because right now that's exactly what he thinks. You and Dustin can go find Eleven. When you do, we can figure things out from there."

She watched Mike take in her words, lips pursed as he looked her over with dark eyes before he turned away from her wordlessly and headed for the door.

Dustin waited until they heard the front door close before speaking.

"He'll get over it," he told her, watching her stare at the door. "He'll see that you're right, eventually."

"I know," she sighed, giving him a useless shrug. "This whole fight is just stupid."

Dustin nodded in agreement, before taking a step towards the door.

"Keep your walkie talkie on in case we need to reach you," he said as he walked backwards. "We'll radio you when we find Eleven, you radio us if you find the gate."

"I will."

"If you do find they gate," he added, placing a hand on the doorknob, "try and convince Lucas to wait for us. We want to go in together. We have to stick together."

"I know," she agreed, nodding her head. As he turned the knob, this all seemed a bit more final. More daunting.

"Stay safe, okay?" he asked her.

"We will," she reassured him. "You do the same. Keep Mike from doing anything stupid."

He gave her a funny grin as he opened the door. "What else would I do?" The door closed behind him, and Ross sighed.

The party was split up now. Her and Lucas off to find Will. Mike and Dustin off to find Eleven. She had a bad feeling about it.

They'd been together through it all up until now.

She shook her head and headed off in the direction Lucas went, towards his room. The door was open and he was by the windows, peering through the curtains as he watched Mike and Dustin pedal off. He turned to her after a moment, waiting for her to say something.

She wasn't going to say anything about Mike, or Dustin, or Eleven. She was done with arguments for now, and judging from his expression, he felt the same.

"What's first?" she asked him.

At this, he offered her a little smirk.

"First, we gear up."

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Ross shouldn't have been so surprised that Lucas seemed knew exactly what he was doing in terms of 'gearing up'. Out of their entire group, he was the survivalist, and they all agreed that if the zombie apocalypse ever actually happened, Lucas would be the last one of

the party to die.

His first order of business was finding them both small backpacks and loading them with his list of essentials.

They each had a knife, him with the hunting knife his grandma gave him, and her with a kitchen knife he claimed his parents wouldn't notice was gone. They each got flashlights and Ross was given the spare batteries. Lucas got his wrist rocket and Ross got a hammer. He grabbed his binoculars, and Ross shoved some granola bars from the pantry in her bag for Will when they found him.

Lucas put on a toolbelt that held who-knows-what, and handed her a brown camouflage bandana to match the green one he'd tied out his forehead.

He helped her put it on in a way that would hide as much of her hair as possible claiming that it would stand out if they had to do some sneaking around. He folded it into a triangle, told her to put her hair in a ponytail and positioned the straight edge over the top of her head before tying the two corners off at the nape of her neck and just below her ponytail.

"Perfect," he told her, grinning widely.

The smile was wiped off of his face a moment later and he grew serious.

"Are you ready?" he asked her.

"Ready steady," she replied with a nod.

They walked their bikes down is driveway, and paused long enough to watch a man climb out of a white van that had the words *Hawkins Power and Light* on the side. They were parked in front of Mike's house, and the driver gave them a short wave.

Lucas waved and Ross nodded at him. He went back to his business, rounding to the back of the van, and they watched him for a second longer before turning away.

Ross looked at the compass they'd taped to her bike handles, and

pointed towards the fake North.

"The gates that way," she said.

Lucas gave a hard nod.

"Let's go."

Disclaimer: I don't own the characters, ideas, or plots of Stranger Things

Guests: Here's that update, I hope you enjoy it!

candy95: It means SO much to hear that. That is one thing that really gets on my nerves when reading other fanfics, is that sometimes the OC sticks out like a sore thumb and the story is just kinda made to revolve around them. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn't. For me, having Ross fit into the plot line seamlessly is a big priority, and I'm happy to hear that I'm doing it well! And yes, Season 3 was super good and I can't wait to write it! And yeah, I'm trying to not fall into that rut with other fanfics where they just kinda send their OC to where ever's easiest to incorporate them, or where ever's gonna give them the most attention. I'm loving your feedback and I hope you enjoy this chapter!

A/N: Chapter 11! I can't really say how many chapters will be left after this, but can say that we're nearing the end in terms of episodes. Sometimes I think i make Ross to...wise, for lack of better word. If you guys know what I mean. Anyways, sorry for any errors, and I hope you enjoy this chapter!

- blockthewriter

12. Chapter 12

Hey, guys! I've decided im going to put the authors note and answer to reviews up here from now on! no real reason why, just because I can. again, I'd like to thank those of you who review, favorite, and follow this story, and all of you for reading it! i really did think i would be one and done with the first story I did, yet here i am! i hope you enjoy this chapter and forgive me for any grammatical errors! thanks again!

- blockthewriter

Carnationally: Thanks! I really wanted to put her with Lucas for this part because in most fanfics she tends to go with Mike and Dustin. Plus, Lucas deserves a little love. If I was in his situation I'd probably be pissed as shit too.

Guest 1: here you are, hope you like it!

Guest 2: Thanks so much! Regarding your question about season 3, I'm afraid not. I'm not sure Eleven can actually see into people's memories, except for that one time with her mother and that was also bc her mom was really trying to tell her something I'm pretty sure. But eventually, if things work out, I do want to bring together It and Stranger Things, so the stranger things hang would eventually clash with penny wise and stuff. But that's probably gonna happen after they release season 4 and stuff.

Guest 3: I've never actually thought about their face claims! For me it's just always something that kind of came into my head, I guess? When I read most stories I usually have something completely different envision in my head than the given face claim, so I guess I never really looked for them. I will say that when I think of Ross's hair I think of Merida's off of Brave. Obviously on a more realistic level, but that's where the inspiration came from for her hair. I also wanna say that you don't have to follow the descriptions I give for my characters. If you think Ross should be a straight haired blonde with brown eyes, go for it :)

candy95: thank you again! Like I said, I'm trying to have a story that isn't like other fanfics and that blends seamlessly with an added character! I hope you like this chapter and I want to thank you for your continued support through this whole fanfic!

Guest 4: Yes! As for when S3 will come out, I'm still debating. I don't know if I should release chapters weekly after I have the whole thing written like I did with Perpelexed, or release each chapter after I write it like with this one. If I did the first option updates would be consistent, but if I did the second there would be a shorter wait between this story and my take on S3. Lemme know what you think!

Now, here's Chapter 12!

Lucas and Ross followed their broken compasses North, straight into the woods. They talked little to none, and Ross got the feeling that Lucas appreciated it. The only two thing to talk about were their mission, and which was pretty straight forward so far; and the fight, which neither of them felt the need to dig into.

They walked along a short strip of the paths they'd been walking on the day before, and just before Ross suggested that north was moving again, Lucas pointed out that they were in new territory.

She was glad it wasn't just her out here, because she definitely wouldn't have noticed.

Eventually they spotted a chain link fence about twice as tall as them, with barbed wire along the top and big signs saying to keep out. They slowed to a stop as they neared it, giving their sore and aching legs somewhat of a rest compared to their long day of walking or biking.

"Look," Lucas muttered, tapping at the compass on her handles. "It's moving."

The little arrow thing inside kept swinging back and forth, like it couldn't quite decide which way it should point.

"Think this is it?" She asked him.

"I don't know," he said, eyeing the fence. She frowned, and looked up at it, too.

"Should we jump it?" She asked him, looking up to meet his eyes. It was a ridiculous question, but it had been quite a ridiculous week so far. "I don't know how we would because there's barbed wire, but we could try." His breath fanned in the air between them, the chilly wind biting through their clothes, and he looked back to the fence.

"Nah," he said, shaking his head. "We'll need to just walk along it until we find something."

It stretched on for as far as they could see through the trees, like a wall.

"Oh man," Lucas complained, reaching down his right hand to rub at the back of his calf. She could relate. They were going at a much faster pace than they had during any of their other search missions, and she was sure she could chalk it down to having less people. All-in-all, she was definitely going to be feeling it tomorrow.

"Let's go left," She decided, nodding off in that direction.

"Left it is then," he sighed, dragging his bike through the leaves at their feet.

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Lucas didn't so much as look up from the compass as they walked. He took Ross's bike to keep an eye on it, saying it never strayed too far from north. So long as it never took a 180, they were going the right way. Ross followed behind him with his own bike, looking through the fence to see if she could spot anything suspicious, and re-reading the same two signs that were plastered every 20 feet. They gave the normal warnings that it was private property and that they should keep out.

They reached the corner of the fence soon enough and Lucas rounded it without a second thought. However, he paused.

"Come here," he told her, waving her over without looking up from the compass. She stood by his side and followed him as he backed the

bike back around the corner, eyes still trained in the compass. "It still point north when you round the corner. North always points towards the fence."

He moved forward again, telling her to watch the arrow as he rounded the corner.

"So the gate's in there?" She asked, looking up to peer through the chain link fence.

Lucas furrowed his eyebrows and shook his head. "It has to be. If what Mr. Clarke said was true, whatever's disrupting the magnetic field is in there. And the gate has to be what's disrupting the magnetic field."

"It doesn't look like the gate's in there," she mused. "I mean, it's not like I know what one looks like but I feel like it would be a little bit noticeable."

"You said you can back from the Upside Down through a tree," Lucas stated blandly, giving her a look. "I wouldn't say that gate was exactly huge."

"Well, yeah, but this is the gate. I think it would be bigger, ya know?"

He shook his head. "It's not like we can see that far into it anyway," he said. "Who knows what's actually on this property. We need to scope it out."

"And how are we going to do that?" Ross asked, watching as he lowered her bike to the ground and gestured for her to do the same. "We don't exactly have a great vantage point."

"Exactly," Lucas told her, looking around quickly in the air before pointing behind her. "That's why we're going to use a tree."

Said tree was huge. It looked sturdy enough and it only went so high before it branched off with limbs thick enough to hold the both of them.

It took a bit of work to get them both up, as there weren't exactly footholds to use. Lucas gave Ross a boost of up the lowest limb they

could reach, and then she had to reach down and help him climb up without falling. There were several close calls, and Ross had to think back to the one time she broke her arm climbing a tree, but eventually they made it out onto one sturdy branch that gave them a better view than on the ground.

"See the building?" Lucas asked her, pointing between the trees. She squinted her eyes against the sun and followed his line of sight as he ruffled through his backpack in search of his binoculars.

"Yeah," she nodded, shifting over slightly so he could lean forward a bit more. He looked through the binoculars and Ross squinted in the same direction he was looking like that alone might help her see as far.

"There's people going in," he relayed back to her. "A huge satellite dish on the roof. Big trucks. Military ones."

"It's government property?" Ross asked, furrowing her eyebrows.

What the hell was going on?

"And there's...shit!"

"Shit?" Ross asked, jumping up straight as Lucas hastily shoved the binoculars back into his bag. "What's shit? Is shit bad? Lucas!"

"We've gotta go," he said hurriedly, moving to climb down to the ground. "We've gotta warn the others!"

"Warn them about what?" she questioned frantically. "What did you see? What's shit?!"

"Ross, shut up and move!The bad men are going to Mike's house!"

She almost fell out of the tree.

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Ross wondered how it looked to any adults or kids they passed by as they rode down the streets.

Two twelve-year-olds speeding down the middle of the road on their bikes, panicked and screaming bloody murder into a walkie talkie.

Ross wished her life could go back to how it was a week ago.

"We're still out of range!" she shouted to Lucas, working to keep pace with him as he pedaled forward. She leaned down to shout into her super comm that she held against her bike handles, just like Lucas was doing to the one he had taped to his. "Can you guys hear us?!"

"Of course we're still out of range!" Lucas said in exasperation, like he was angry at the whole world in general for making things take very very bad turns. "Of course we are! Son of bitch!"

They'd spent their entire time running sick through the forest with their bikes and pedaling back into town trying to get ahold of Dustin or Mike. Ross wasn't even 100% sure why Lucas was so panicked in the first place. Yeah, the bad men were going to Mike's but how did he know?

Instead of spending wasteful time on trying to bager it out of him, she just opted to just trust his judgement that something was seriously wrong. Her voice was going to go raw from how loudly and frantically she was shouting, and her breathing was getting a bit too heavy for her liking.

"Lucas, if you can hear us, slow down," came Mike's voice through their speakers. "We can't understand you."

"Yes, I copy!" Lucas yelled. "We copy! Do you?"

Ross didn't even wait for an answer and shouted down at her super comm, "They know about Eleven! They know she's been to your house!"

"Get out of there!" Lucas added breathlessly. "The bad men are coming! All of them!"

Nothing came in over the speakers and Lucas growled. "Do you hear me?! The bad men are coming!"

The super comm stayed silent, and Ross pushed herself to pedal faster

because their lack of response could mean the absolute worst.

"Guys?!" She yelled, bending over to place her face closer to the speaker. "If you can hear us fucking answer? This is important!"

"We're too far out of range!" Lucas said angrily. "We've gotta hurry and just hope they heard us!"

They biked on for a few more blocks, panting and ignoring the strange looks they got from anyone who saw them. Then their speakers crackled and they heard Dustin's voice come in over the static.

"Oh, my God. Oh, my god. Oh, my god!"

"Dustin!" Lucas exclaimed, wobbling on his bike as he leaned towards his super comm. "Dustin, do you copy?"

"Yeah, Lucas, they're on us!" He said, and Ross could hear his labored breathing.

"Fuck!" she exclaimed, hitting her handle.

"Where are you?" Lucas asked.

"Cornwallis!"

"Meet us at Elm and Cherry!" He told them, taking the lead in front of Ross. As terrible as she was with directions, she didn't particularly mind.

"Copy. Elm and Cherry!"

"Hurry, Ross!" Lucas shouted over his shoulder, and she pushed herself faster.

"I'm hurrying!" She panted, hoping that she didn't end up falling off of her bike. She was standing up while riding and her momentum from pedaling was throwing the bike's balance everywhere.

They turned into Cherry and got about halfway down the street before suddenly Dustin and Mike (with Eleven behind him) came

speeding onto the street from the gap between two houses.

"Shit!" Ross exclaimed, slamming her feet down on the cement to slow herself down. Her and Lucas's tired squealed against the ground as they pulled themselves to a stop, and Lucas rammed into his handle bars with his momentum while she almost tipped over on her bike.

"Where are they?" Lucas asked breathlessly, and Mike stammered out his response.

"I—I don't know," he said, panic on the edge of his tone.

"I think we lost them," Dustin said, and not a moment later they heard the sound of loud engines behind them.

They looked over their shoulders to see several of the Hawkins Power and Lightvans about to turn onto the very street they sat.

"Go, go, go!" Mike yelled at them all, jerking into motion so fast that Eleven had to tighten her grip on his shoulders lest she fall off.

"Why are there so many of them!" Ross complained loudly, forcing herself to move again after the short lived break she just got.

She got no answer because Mike wouldn't stop yelling "Go!", Dustin was shouting out cuss words at the top of his lungs, and Lucas was saying "Faster" like it would actually make them go faster.

Ross chanced a glance behind her to see the three vans closing in on them and joined Dustin in his never ending hail of curse words. He stopped that a second later though, in favor of all out screaming. She looked up to see a fourth van swerve onto the road straight in front of them, going full speed.

None of her friends stopped pedaling and the van didn't stop driving. She was suddenly reminded of the game Arrow Roulette but instead of waiting to see which one of them moved first they were waiting to see who stopped first. And it seemed like neither side was chicken enough to do so.

Ross screamed when the van heading their way suddenly went

airborne, flipping over their heads completely. She was so caught off guard she nearly fell off her bike, and barely had enough time to look behind her and see it land upside down in the way of the other three vans.

No one said anything for a moment as they kept biking forward, only giving each other varying looks of shock and confusion.

She turned to look at Eleven as the girl turned back forward to look over Mike's shoulder. Obviously, she was the one who did it, but she didn't look phased at all!

Ross couldn't help it.

"What the fuck!"

.

They didn't stop biking until they reached the junk yard, and Ross was thankful they made it there by way of roads rather than pedaling through the woods like they did the other day.

By the time her, Dustin, and Lucas caught up to Mike, he was already helping a dazed and tired looking Eleven off of his bike. He'd been a few yards ahead of them the entire ride, despite having to carry the extra weight of Eleven along with him.

Ross immediately threw her bike to the ground and collapsed next to it, staring up at the sky as Dustin started to speak incredulously about what had happened.

"Holy shit! Did you see what she did to that van?"

"No, Dustin," Mike said wryly. "We missed it." She let out a laugh, but it was nearly breathless. That was probably the most physical she'd ever been.

"I mean, that was—that was—"

"Awesome," Lucas panted, sounding as out of breath as she felt. Ross looked over to see Eleven turn over her shoulder to look at Lucas, a steady stream of blood daring to reach her lip. "It was awesome."

Eleven was on the ground, too, sitting in the grass, and Lucas took a few steps to kneel beside her. He took a few deep breaths and the twisted around so she could face him completely.

"Everything I said about you being a traitor and stuff," he started, his breathing pattern going back to normal, "I was wrong. I'm sorry."

He placed a hand on her shoulder and she stared back at him before saying quietly, "Friends...friends don't lie. I'm sorry, too."

Lucas smiled at her, and Mike spoke up as well.

"Me, too," he said. He held his hand out for Lucas, and the other boy rose to his feet and grabbed it tightly. They both gave each other a firm hand shake, smiling at each other, and Ross felt like she could finally breath with the fight being over. She let out a heavy sigh and let her head fall back against the grass.

However, a second later Dustin kicked her shoulder. She peered up at him, about to complain about how tired she was and that she deserved to lay down for a moment, but he glared at her pointedly and nodded his head in the direction of the other three.

Right. She was technically one to blame, too.

"Uh, I'm sorry as well," she said, pushing herself into a sitting position as she looked at Eleven. "I shouldn't have yelled at you. It was stupid of me."

"You were all being stupid," Dustin added. "But that's not important now. What's important now, is out next plan of action."

"Next plan of action?" Ross questioned. "I don't even know what just happened."

"How'd you find out they were coming for us?" Mike asked. "Did you find the gate."

Lucas sighed and slumped to the ground, waving his hand and gesturing for everyone to huddle up. "Me and Ross followed the compasses north and found some sort of lab out in the woods, by Randolph Road. I saw a bunch of those vans that were following us

going down the drive, and before we left my house we saw one parked in your drive way."

"Out by Randolph Road?" Dustin asked. "That's Hawkins Lab, isn't it?"

"Here." Lucas reached behind him and grabbed a few sticks, making a crudely shaped square on the ground between them all. "This is Randolph Road, right here. The fence starts here and goes all the was around." He placed the fourth stick on the ground and picked up an old van, setting it inside the square.

"And this is the lab right here," he said. "But the gate has to be in there somewhere. It's gotta be. That's where the compass kept pointing to no matter which edge of the fence we were at."

"Who owns Hawkins Lab?" Dustin asked.

"The sign says Department of Energy," Lucas said.

"Department of Energy? What do you think that means?"

Ross scratched her head in thought. Something seemed vaguely familiar about the terms Hawkins Lab and Department of Energy, but she couldn't put her finger on it.

"It means government," Mike answered. "Military."

"Then why does it say energy?" Dustin asked.

"Just trust me, alright? It's military. My dad's told me before."

"Mike's right," Lucas agreed. "There's soldiers out front."

"Do they make, like, lightbulbs or something?"

"Are you stupid?" Ross asked Dustin, smacking his shoulder. "Why would the military make lightbulbs?"

"I don't know!" He exclaimed, hitting her back. "It's a department of energy! Like electricity. Hence, lightbulbs!"

"No, weapons," Mike corrected him. "To fight the Russians and

commies and stuff."

"Weapons," Lucas repeated, staring at Eleven. He glanced at each of them before they seemed to catch on.

"Oh, Jesus, this is bad," Dustin groaned. Ross nodded in agreement.

"Really bad," Lucas continued. "The place is like a fortress."

"Well, what do we do?" Dustin asked.

"I don't know, but we can't go home," Mike stated. "We're fugitives now."

"Home," Ross muttered, shaking her head. "My dad's gonna kill me."

"Tell me about it," Lucas sighed, rubbing his eyes.

"G-guys?" Dustin stuttered, drawing in their attention. He was looking off into the distance and Ross followed his gaze. "Do you hear that?"

She squinted at the skyline, making out a black speck in the distance. She sat up straighter, furrowing her eyebrows. "Is that a helicopter?"

They all stared for a moment longer before Lucas jumped to his feet, pulling Eleven up while he did. "Hide the bikes! Quick! Get in the bus!" He pushed Eleven towards the bus doors and grabbed the nearest bike off the ground.

Ross moved to pry the bus doors open, pulling against the rusty hinges while the boys did their best to shove the bikes under the bus.

"Go, go!" Ross exclaimed as soon as she got the doors open. Eleven rushed up the steps and Ross followed, ducking next to one of the old seats as the boys ran up after them.

"Get down!" Lucas warned, crashing into the floor against the wall next to Ross. Dustin crouched next to the bus seats and Mike and Eleven did the same, listening with bated breath as the helicopter whirred above them.

"Mental," Dustin breathed out.

Ross threw him a look.

"Seriously? Those are your only words?"

.

They sat on the bus for what felt like forever. The noise helicopter was still present, hovering around and moving from place to place, but close enough that they could still hear its consistent hum or see it out the old windows of the bus.

Many times they'd discussed some form of escape plan but it was always shot down with the helicopters constant presence. The moment they stepped foot out of that bus the exact people they were hiding from would find them.

It was getting to the point that Ross was irritated and at a loss, fists clenched tightly as she stared out of the window with her brows furrowed. She had no idea what they were going to do now. It was only a matter of time before they sent someone into the junk yard on foot to find them.

Ross perked up when she heard a muffled voice, turning her eyes to the outside of the bus to see if anyone else was around.

"You guys hear that?" Dustin asked them all.

She nodded, and pulled her attention to Mike's backpack where the noise was coming from. He lunged for it, pulling it open and grabbing his super comm from inside of it as they all huddled around. "Mike, we need you to answer."

"Is that your sister?" Lucas asked incredulously, staring at the walkie talkie.

Mike glanced at him and turned back forward as Nancy's voice came back through. "This is an emergency, Mike.Do you copy?"

"How is she talking on there?" Ross asked. "She doesn't have a super comm. And she wouldn't know our channel."

"I don't know," Mike said with a shrug.

"Mike, do you copy?"

"Okay, this is really weird," Dustin decided. Lucas made a grab for the walkie talkie, but Mike pulled it out of his reach.

"Don't answer!"

"She said it was an emergency!" Lucas exclaimed.

"What if it's a trick?!"

"It's Nancy!" Ross said, reaching for it, too. Mike smacked her hand away and scooter away from her and Lucas.

"It's your sister," Lucas told him.

"What if the bad people kidnapped her?" Mike asked them. "What if they're forcing her to say this?"

"I need you to answer," Nancy begged on the other end.

"It's like Lando Calrissian," Dustin muttered, eyes going wide. "Don't answer!"

"Lando who?" Ross asked.

"We need to know that you're there, Mike," Nancy said. Her sentence abruptly ended, though, and her voice was replaced by one they all found familiar.

"Listen, kid, this is the Chief," Jim Hopper said from the other end. "If you're there, pick up."

"Shit," Ross cursed.

"We know you're in trouble and we know about the girl," he said.

"Why is she with the chief?" Lucas asked.

"How the hell does he know about..." Dustin trailed off with his sentence and turned his gaze to Eleven.

"We can protect you, we can help you, but you gotta pick up," Chief

Hopper told them. "Are you there? Do you copy? Over."

It was silent for a moment before Ross nudged Mike. "Answer him, Mike."

"Are we sure?" He asked them all. Lucas nodded.

"Yeah," he said, nodding his head. "Yeah, answer him."

Mike nodded once before lifting the super comm up. "Yeah, I copy. It's Mike. I'm here."

He glanced around at them all before continuing.

"We're here."

13. Chapter 13

Hey, guys! back with chapter 13! Sorry about the wait, I've been super busy with school, my art, and then i recently just got another job. i'm hoping to get the next chapter out sooner than i did with this one. With how things are looking there will be one or two chapters left! then I'll start writing season 3. i'm super excited to write Ross and Richie again! anyways, hope you guy's enjoy this chapter!

- blockthewrter

PrettyRecklessLaura: Thanks! I hope you enjoy this chapter!

candy95: Thank you! Me too! Looks like there's gonna be one or two chapters left!

Guest 1: Me too! and yes! I'm excited to start writing S3!

Guest 2: Yes! I never even thought of that, but I bet Richie would be Hopper's personal headache.

Guest 3: We'll see!

AhYesAUsername: Thank you so much! it means a lot!

Guest 4: Here it is!

"Will you stop pacing?"

Ross looked up to Dustin from the floor, raising her eyebrows as he spun back around on his heels to meet Mike's glare.

He started pacing the moment Hopper told them he was coming to get them, his breathing heavy like his footsteps, and he rubbed at his neck incessantly. The rest of them had all sat down to stare aimlessly into the distance until someone came, and Ross was fighting off sleep when Mike snapped at Dustin.

"It's been way to long," Dustin stressed, continuing to walk up and

down the small bus. Ross picked herself off the floor to sit next to Eleven on one of the old bus seats. "You know what? Maybe you're right. Maybe this is all a trap, and the bad men are coming to get us right now!" He finished with a shout.

"It's not a trap!" Lucas argued back, rolling his eyes. "Why would the chief set us up? Nancy, maybe,but the chief?"

Mike threw his hands up and gave Lucas a 'what the fuck' look, and Ross scoffed, shaking her head.

"I know she can be a bitch, no offense Mike, but you guys need to have more faith in Nancy, she wouldn't sell us out." she defended the girl. Then, she added, "If anything, Hopper would. He's a police officer, he works for the government."

"See!" Dustin exclaimed, point at Ross. "Hopper and the bad men are practically coworkers! And Nancy's gonna be like Lando!"

"Would you shut about Lando?" Lucas retorted.

"I don't think Hopper would set us up, though," Ross clarified. "He'd just be more likely to than Nancy."

"You aren't helping!" Lucas snapped at her.

"I don't feel good about this," Dustin muttered, continuing his way up and down the isle. He leaned down towards Lucas and shouted it again. "I don't feel good about this!"

"When do you feel good about anything?" the Sinclair boy yelled back, and Dustin merely shook his head and continued to pace. Lucas dropped his head into his hand and Ross slumped down in her seat, watching as Mike and Eleven exchanged wary glances.

Of course as soon as they all got back to together again they had to be fighting.

Suddenly, the sound of approaching vehicles reached their ears and they all looked up at once, towards the front of the bus. Leaping up from their spots, they ran to the front and crowded the windshield to see who it was.

A brown, normal looking car pulled into the lot, and Ross breathed a sigh of relief. There were none of the vans from earlier, which meant they were in the clear.

But then a second car pulled up, identical to the first, a moment later.

Or course.

"Shit!" Dustin hissed, gripped the old steering wheel tightly.

"Go, go, go, go!" Mike exclaimed, pulling Eleven and Ross towards the back to the bus.

Ross tripped and fell flat onto the floor, but didn't bother to get up as the others ducked down out of sight. She just flattened herself to the floor and put her hands over her head, like that would keep the men from seeing her were they to get on the bus.

"Lando," Dustin panted out quietly, eyes blown wide open as he looked at the windows from his spot.

"They didn't," she hissed at him, shaking her head. But the paranoid part of her that had been rearing it's ugly head lately asked in the back of her mind, did they? She didn't think they would, but she also didn't know Nancy extremely well. She had only met Hopper for the first time a few days ago. What if they did?

"Do you think they saw us?" Lucas whispered, and Mike poked his head out from around the seat he and Eleven were hiding behind with a fierce glare.

"All of you, shut up!" he hissed, sinking power in his spot as Eleven looking over his shoulder at them.

Outside the bus, car doors slammed closed and they all jumped. Then came long, excruciating moments of silence. They couldn't hear anything except for the soft footfall in the grass, that didn't make enough noise for them to pinpoint where they might be.

Ross held her breath. It was so quiet that her breathing felt like a dead giveaway. Her heart was thudding in her chest because, damn, if they got caught it was all over. They were all going to get arrested,

Eleven was going to get taken away, Will would never be found. She would live out the rest of her days in a prison cell, playing the harmonica on her hard metal bed.

Oh, fuck that.

She flinched when the door to the bus squeaked, and threw her head down, putting her arms up and digging her fingers into hair like maybeif she didn't see them, they wouldn't see her.

She heard the dull clang of someone taking a step onto the bus, heard Lucas's intake of breath stop so abruptly it could have been mistaken for him choking, and heard the sound of something slamming into something else. There was a grunt, another squeal of the doors as something hit it, and then the heavy thud of something hitting the grass.

Ross uncovered her head and looked up, turning on her side to look behind her towards the door. What?

"Hey!" She jumped again (shut up) at the voice from outside, and sat up a bit straighter as there was another smacking noise and a thud.

"What the—" Came a second later, and ended with an aggravated and painful, "Agh!" as one final object (body, it had to be a body) hit the ground outside.

For a few seconds there was no more noise. The door squeaked again, and simultaneously everyone but Ross stood up to see who it was going to be. She just rolled over into a sitting position, clutching her book bag in her hands.

Hopper stepped onto the old vehicle, eyes falling onto them immediately. He had his hat on, and he held a gun in his hand.

"Alright," He panted, waving for them to follow him. "Let's go."

No one moved. It didn't seem quite true that he was there. That was too lucky of them, and they weren't very lucky to begin with.

"Let's go!" Hopper yelled at them, stepping off the bus as Ross sprung to her feet while the other's grabbed their bags.

They all loaded into his police vehicle; Lucas, Dustin, and Ross piled in the back leaving Mike and Eleven to share the front seat. There was little talk as they drove off, aside from a few pestering questions to Hopper at first.

All they managed to get was that: No, he wasn't secretly with the government. No, Nancy wasn't secretly with the government, either. They were going to the Byers house. He knew about Eleven already. Ross also got the feeling that they were annoying him (even though he always seemed to be in a constant state of annoyance), and shushed Dustin until he finally stopped talking.

When they finally got to Will's, they all piled out of the car, spying at Joyce, Jonathan, and Nancy standing on the porch. Nancy rushes out to meet Mike, hugging him tightly and giving them all pause, because really? When was the last Nancy showed any sort of physical concern for Mike in the past few years?

The answer was none, and even Mike seemed completely shocked (and crazy confused) as the pulled him away at arms lengths to look him over quickly.

"I was so worried about you!" she exclaimed, squeezing his arms.

Mike didn't seem fully convinced and replied with a half-hearted, "Yeah, uh...me too?" Ross couldn't help but smile at him at his befuddlement, and Nancy didn't seem to really his tone any thought.

Instead she glanced behind him, eyes falling on the other four who all stood in a line behind them, watching the exchange with varying expression (Dustin looked like he was about to go into shock), before she finally settled at Eleven.

And it seemed that of all the things she could have said, could have asked, the only thing she found fit was, "Is that my dress?"

.

"Okay, so in this example, we're the acrobat," Mike said, pointing to the little stick figure he had drawn out on paper. "Will, Ross, and Barbara, and that monster, they're this flea, here. And this is the

Upside Down, where Will is hiding."

He looked up to make sure the adults and Nancy and Jonathan were paying attention. He set the paper down when he saw their eyes trained on him, and said, "Mr. Clarke said the only way to get there is through a rip on time and space."

They had given them a brief rundown over the past few days, mentioning nearly everything, like Ross being in the Upside Down, them using the Heath Kit at school to get in contact with Will, and even about Eleven breaking Troy Harrington's arm (but they only mentioned that last part because Hopper specifically asked about it).

"A gate," Dustin elaborated at the blank looks they were getting.

"That we tracked to Hawkins Lab," Lucas added.

"With our compasses," Dustin said, like it was a detail that could not be forgot. Ross only sighed heavily and shook her head.

"It's been a long day," she muttered.

They all only glanced at each other, giving no really sign of understanding and actually looking completely lost.

"Oka,y, so the gate has a really staring electromagnetic field," he started to explain, " and that can change the directions of a compass needle.

"Is this gate underground?" Hopper asked them seriously. Or, more serious than normal, at least.

Ross furrowed her eyebrows, scrunching up her nose as she said, "How the hell are we supposed to know?" He turned to look at her, eyebrows raised high and a glare fixing on her before—

"Yes."

Hopper's stare is ripped away from her (and thank goodness because it was probably one of the most intimidating things she'd ever seen) and it settles on Eleven. It was the first thing she'd said since they arrived.

"Near a large water tank?" He asked her.

"Yes," she nodded slowly.

"How—how do you know all that?" Dustin asked Hopper. It was throwing them off guard that Hopper happened to know more about it all than they did. Or at least, something they didn't know. As far as they had been concerned, they were the only ones that knew about Eleven, Will, the gate, or anything.

Ross wasn't even quite sure where the adults came into play. Of course they would all be involved somehow, but without Eleven how would they know that there was something else going on other than the bullshit story of Will falling into the quarry?

"He's seen it," Mike deducted, leveling the police officer with a mildly suspicious and in-awe stare. Ross just shook her head, focusing on the table. It seemed the more they found out the more confusing it all got.

Before any of them got to ask Hopper how he'd managed to see the Gate, Joyce was leaning across the table to speak to Eleven, her voice careful and soft. "Is there any other way that you could...you could reach Will? That you could talk to him in this—"

"The Upside Down," Eleven finished for her.

"Down," Joyce whispered. "Yeah."

Eleven nodded silently, and Nancy leaned forward, too.

"And my friend, Barbara?" she asked. Ross didn't miss the desperation in her tone. "Can you find her, too?"

.

They gathered everything they needed, which surprisingly wasn't much. Mike offered up his supercomm for them to use. Nancy provided a ripped picture of Barb (Ross wasn't sure why she had it or why it was ripped up. In fact, other than knowing that Barb was missing, none of the kids knew how Nancy and Jonathan came to be involved). And Jonathan has ran to his room to grab a picture of

Will, the same one they'd used on the missing posters.

The white noise from the walkie talkie filled the room, grating against their ears as they all watched Eleven, who was sitting straight up in a chair and had her eyes closed. They'd already been sitting for several minutes, waiting for someone to happen. The boys said that Will's voice would be able to project through the supercomm to them, but it had yet to do so.

Ross perked up when the light above them began to flicker and the static started to fade in and out. She waiting for Will's voice, but there was still nothing.

The light stopped flickering and Eleven opened her eyes.

"I'm sorry," she said, and immediately Joyce leaned forward, panic creeping into her features.

"W-what? What's wrong?" Joyce asked. "What happened?"

"I can't find them," Eleven said, her voice breaking. Her eyes were glossy and it looked like she was going to cry any second.

Ross looked down, rubbing her fingers across the tabletop. She didn't want to see anyone else's reaction. She didn't want to see Joyce's heart broken expression or Jonathan's suffering eyes as he walked away.

Next to her, Eleven brushed her fingers against Ross's elbow and asked, "Bathroom?" She nodded, sliding out of her char and nodding her head towards the hallway.

Eleven followed her quietly, and when they reached the bathroom Ross pushed open the door for her. She brushed past her and Ross glanced back down the hallway, debating if she should close the door or not because of Eleven's weird thing with it.

When she looked back in the bathroom, Eleven's was standing next to the sink, watching her, tears running down her face.

Ross stepped into the bathroom with her, shut the door and said, "It's not your fault. You know that, right?"

Apparently, she didn't. Wrapping her arms around her self, Eleven bowed her head and squeezed her eyes shut, sniffling. Ross wasn't sure what to do. She didn't know Eleven well enough to hug her (like at all), and she wasn't even sure she would want a hug in the first place.

So she settled for putting a hand on her shoulder and squeezing it softly. "No one blames you for not being able to find them. You've had a lot day and you've gotta be tired by now. Your powers probably just need time to recharge or something."

Eleven let out a shuddering breath and nodded, looking up to meet her eyes. Ross smiled and rubbed her arm comfortingly.

"Everything's gonna be fine, El. You've done a lot for us already." She let go and sat down on the edge of the bathtub, stretching her legs out in front of her. "If it weren't for you, we wouldn't have even known that Will was alive. Not for sure, anyway. So, thanks for that."

Eleven turned towards the sink and turned it on, running her hands underneath the water before wiping off her face.

"Also," Ross continued, "if it weren't for you, we would've gotten hit by that van. The whole flipping it over our heads thing was super badass."

Eleven stared into the mirror as Ross bent her head back and crossed her ankles.

"You also made Troy piss his pants," she said. She wanted to keep the air filled with anything but awkward silence, so she kept talking. "And broke his arm, which is great. The guy's a douche."

Eleven turned around to look at her—no, the bathtub, but Ross didn't notice.

"Oh yeah, and then you saved Mike from falling to his death, which is always a nice thing to do and—" she paused, catching the way Eleven was staring. "What?"

.

Ross followed Eleven back to the kitchen after she gave her a vague (extremelyvague, it was ridiculous, but Ross had to remember the girl's vocabulary was limited) explanation of what the was thinking. The others were all huddled around the table, discussing what Ross assumed to be Eleven's lack of freaky mind powers at the moment.

Eleven walked up to the table and got straight to to.

"The bath."

Everyone turned around to face them at once, and Ross raised her eyebrows as their questioning stares fell onto her. She nodded towards Eleven, because they sure as hell weren't getting the answer out of her.

"What?" Joyce asked.

"I can find them," Eleven said with a deep breath. "In the bath."

Again, they looked to Ross and she shrugged. "That's all she said to me, too."

.

"Mr. Clarke? It's Dustin."

They'd come up with some shaky answer of what Eleven might have meant, and decided the best way to proceed was to learn more.

And so they called their science teacher.

Mr. Clarke said something over the phone that Ross couldn't make out, and Dustin nodded quickly.

"Yeah, yeah. I just, I—I have a, uh, science question." There was a pause as Mr. Clarke responses and then, "Do you know anything about sensory deprivation tanks? Specifically how to build one?"

"Because that's nots weird to ask at all," Ross muttered. Lucas elbowed her in the side and Dustin turned around and threw her a look.

"Fun," Dustin drew out, turning back around as Mr. Clarke spoke to him.

Ross raised her eyebrows in surprise as Dustin began to speak loudly and quickly, his tone laced with accusation. "You always say we should never stop being curious. To always open any curiosity door we find. Why are you keeping this curiosity door locked?"

Apparently that was enough to convince Mr. Clarke to sit down and give Dustin a step-by-step plan to creating their own deprivation tank. They handed him a pen and paper and he sat at the table, writing everything down.

"Uh-huh. Uh-huh. How much?" Dustin made a face at whatever amount was said, but wrote it down nonetheless. "Uh-huh. Yep, all right. Yeah, we'll be careful. Definitely."

Ross leaned back in the chair she was sharing with Eleven and looked over to Lucas, shaking her head. "Why would he even tell us this stuff? We're seventh graders."

Lucas only gave her a shrug and a look that clearly said he wasn't complaining.

"Alright Mr. Clarke. Yeah, I'll see you on Monday. I'll see you on Monday, Mr. Clarke. I'll see you—" Dustin pulled the phone away from his ear entirely and said into the receiver, "I'll see you in Monday, buh-bye."

He hung up the phone and looked at Joyce, pointing the pencil at her. "Do you still have that kiddie pool we bobbed for apples in?"

"I think so?" she said, looking to Jonathan for confirmation. He nodded and she turned back to Dustin, "Yeah."

"Good. Then all we need is salt. Lots of it."

"How much is 'lots'?" Hopper asked.

Dustin looks down at the paper again before saying, "1500 pounds."

"Holy fuck," Ross said, scratching her forehead. Joyce looked up at

her and shock and Hopper gave her a hard glare. "Sorry. That's just a lot."

"Well," Nancy asked. "Where are we gonna get that much salt anyway?"